

Mark 3:16-19 - The Good News of the Apostles - Part 2

Last week we began our look at the 12 apostles that Jesus raised up to lead the church. An apostle, if you remember, is one of 3 offices in the church that are publicly recognized as officials: apostles, elders and deacons. I don't believe that apostles exist anymore. Paul says that he was appointed an apostles "last of all" in **1 Cor. 15:8**. And since him there is no one who meets the criteria to be an apostle.

There are 3 criteria to be an apostle according to Scripture: you had to have seen the risen Jesus personally, you had to have been commissioned by him specifically, and you had to have the ability to do miracles and wonders and signs. Many people in the early church could claim one or 2 of those qualifications, but only a select few could claim all 3.

Just by way of historical observation, the church Fathers - the influential pastors and theologians who lived just after the apostles - all universally accepted and taught that the apostles had died out in the 1st century. Throughout history the only people who have claimed there are still apostles are usually very unorthodox people with very strange and heretical teachings.

Now, theologically, the big picture in this section is that Jesus is completely redefining who God's people are. No longer is worship or the inclusion of the people of God based on lineage from the 12 tribes of Israel. It is now based on following Jesus and following the teaching of his 12 apostles. The apostles' teaching is replacing tribal lineage in terms of what matters to be part of the people of God. And, like I mentioned last week, it is hard to state just how massive a shift this is.

Jesus is on a mountain, the massive crowds are with him, he calls 12 men to lead his people - it's the fulfillment of what happened at Sinai. Sinai looked forward to this moment where God is on the mountain again forming a chosen people for his own glory. Jesus is transforming the people of God.

Now, this morning I want to look at the apostles a little more specifically. Who they were. These were godly men, used of God, to build his church and we want honor how God used them. So I want to look at this section in 2 broad categories.

The 1st category is who the apostles were **not**. And then secondly we'll actually look at who the apostles were.

1) Who the Apostles Were Not. That sounds odd but I think it might be more helpful than we realize at first to think about what Jesus is doing here if we look at who he didn't select.

So let me make 4 observations about who the apostles were not.

1. The apostles were not known religious leaders. At least not the original 12. Paul was a Pharisee and Barnabas may have been part of the priesthood because he was a levitate. But all the initial 12 had no religious status at all.

We read last week in **Acts 4** that Peter and John were considered uneducated men by the religious leaders who put them on trial. They had no formal training whatsoever.

They weren't part of the Pharisees - the religious conservatives. They weren't Sadducees, the religious liberals who denied the resurrection and the existence of angels and the spiritual world. They weren't priests who had duties at the Temple.

You would think that if Jesus was going to put together a group of men who would teach and lead the people of God going forward that he would include a token religious leader or two to help bridge the gap between Judaism and Christianity. Someone who had studied the Law somewhat or had intimate knowledge of the sacrificial system and knew their way around the Temple.

But he doesn't. These are all outsiders. Many of these guys are fishermen. They make their living on a boat. Matthew is a tax collector. Simon the Zealot is probably both a political operative and a religious zealot but with no formal training. We know little about the background of the others.

But the question we might ask is: Why not choose someone who has that background? Why skip that? **Look at Phil 3:2-11.**

As I said, Paul was an exception to this situation. He was not part of the original 12, but he was formally trained by the renowned Rabbi Gamaliel, and he was excelling as a Pharisee faster than his contemporaries. He was the rising star in Judaism of his day. But look what he says concerning all of that. **Read 2-11**

It's all rubbish. See if you have a religious foundation - even based on the Bible - but it is devoid of personal love and devotion to Jesus then it doesn't matter how well you know it or how advanced you are.

There's a new series coming out with Jordan Petersen, the well-known unbelieving psychologist from Canada about the book of Exodus. And I'm sure it's interesting. But you know what it's devoid of? Devotion and love to Jesus.

Ben Shapiro has a lot of interesting conservative political takes and thoughts on the Bible and has a background in Orthodox Judaism. But do you know what he's devoid of? Love and devotion to Jesus.

See, the deal is that Jesus doesn't need people with a lot of degrees and a lot of brains and a lot of training in formal religious systems. What he needs are people who love him with their whole heart and soul and mind and strength and simply know his Word.

There's a place for information and learning. We are called to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. I'm all for Bible college and seminary and study and theology, I think you know that. But studying the Bible outside of love for Christ is less than worthless. It's rubbish, it's a liability to judgment before God. That's what Paul was doing in his former life. And he counts it all rubbish - excrement.

You know what he's saying: even with all that info and training he's got to start all over anyway.

Because more important: the people God uses for his Kingdom primarily are those who are sold out for Jesus. Who love Jesus and abide in Jesus and learn from Jesus through the Word of Jesus. And know their only hope and joy is in Jesus.

It's the same with us. We can have all the formal training, all the theology down, all the brainiac answers. But who God uses for his Kingdom are humble people who know and love Jesus.

So it shouldn't surprise us that there aren't any religious professionals among the initial 12. There are 12 untrained men who are growing in their love of the Lord..

So there are no religious leaders among the 12.

2) There are also no gentiles among the 12. If you **look** back in Mark these are all Jewish guys. All of them are from Galilee in the north except Judas. If you have a KJV it translates **Vs. 18** to say that Simon was a Canaanite - meaning he would not have been a Jew. But that's actually a poor translation. Really, the root word is someone who is a zealot, passionate. Often referring to a political zealot or a religious zealot - or both. But all of them are Jews.

Why is that important? Because I think this is the link of continuity between the OC and the NC. Yes Jesus is doing something radically different here in terms of how God is worshipped. And what he's doing has nothing to do with the 12 tribes of Israel. Yes there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female but we are all one in Christ.

But Jesus uses 12 Jews to be the foundation of his Kingdom. And it's not like there weren't gentiles in the area. When we read the gospels there are gentiles all over the place. He could have found some but he didn't.

I think he chooses 12 Jewish guys on purpose to establish a link between the OC and the NC.

I think it's important to remember just how indebted we are to the Jewish people that God raised up over the centuries. They were a special people, a chosen people, a precious people to the Lord.

Even Paul who basically swears off his formal religious training and status among the religious elite still views his Jewish heritage as a good thing and the Jewish people as having been blessed by God.

Rom. 9:4-5 Speaking of the Jewish people: They are Israelites, and to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Do you realize that every promise we have is somehow rooted and connected to the Jewish people because God gave all his promises to Jews - or the fathers of the Jewish people.

The NC in Jesus gives us access into the covenant with Abraham. Remember when he's looking into the sky at all the stars and God says that's how many kids you'll have? Every person who believes in Jesus represents one of those stars he staring at when he believed God's promise.

The OT was a book written by Jews to Jews. The NT was a book written mostly by Jews to Jews and Gentiles. Despite what Andy Stanley says, the NT is not unhitched from the OT. They are necessary companions of the same story.

God uses these Jewish men to establish his multi national Church.

Side: There are 2 errors we need to avoid. First is antisemitism. There's no room for hating Jews among Christians. There have been many self-professed Christians who have expressed hatred for Jews over the centuries. Even Martin Luther was antisemitic to a degree. But that has no place among believing Christians. I mean: we worship a Jewish man and follow the teachings of his 12 Jewish apostles.

Frankly, there's no room for hating anyone because every person is made in the image of God.

Second thing we need to avoid is the error of the Hebrew Roots movement where we sort of idolize the Jewish people and culture and feel like we play second fiddle to anyone with Jewish descent.

Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ are not somehow superior to us and their culture is not somehow superior to ours.

God has made the 2 people - Jew and Gentile - one in Christ Jesus through his death on a cross. And that message was first authoritatively proclaimed by Jewish apostles.

3) There are no family members here. At least not at the beginning. I mentioned last week that James, Jesus's half-brother, became an apostle. And Jude, also the half brother of Jesus, may also have been an apostle. But no one else was family.

And actually, none of the initial apostles even seem to be even close with Jesus personally. It doesn't seem that any of these men were long time friends of Jesus, guys he grew up with, or had a strong relationship with before they were called into ministry. They may have been familiar with John the Baptist and his ministry but most of them have a fairly abrupt calling to follow Jesus. There doesn't seem to be any ramp up into this movement at all.

What do we make of that? Well, Jesus is not building any sort of nepotistic Kingdom. He's not building a Kingdom based on his blood line or family line or connection to his relatives. If anything, the gospel writers paint his blood family in the most antagonistic light possible.

Notice how Mark sandwiches comments about Jesus's family. **Read 20-21** So here his family is embarrassed about him. He'll go on to talk about the fact that he's not casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul. Then watch the aftermath. **Read 31-34**

We know that Jesus loved his mother and brothers - he died for them and would take pains to ensure Mary was taken care of after his death. But he made it clear that that what really mattered was not relation to Mary or even himself. There's no advantage to being related to anyone physically in the Kingdom of God.

The only thing that matters is a love for and submission to the will of God.

2 Pet. 1:1: [Peter writes to those] who have obtained a faith of equal standing with our by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ.

The faith that you have and I have is the same as that of the apostles. It gains us the same access to the same Jesus because it's the same righteousness of Christ that has been applied to our account.

4) There are no women in this group. Jesus has specifically raised up men to lead his church - both apostles initially, and elders perpetually. Both of those offices are men.

I believe that deacons can be men or women. Paul in **1 Tim. 3** gives indication women can be deacons. And, second, because deacons neither exercise authority in the church and they are not responsible for teaching in the churches.

But in both covenants God has designed men to lead his people. All the tribes of Israel were men. And even the leaders within those individual tribes were men. The elders of the cities were men, the priests were all men. This is interesting: the musical leaders were all men.

People want to point out the exception of Debra in the book of Judges. But she is just that: an exception. And even Debra herself calls out Barack for his lack of courage to fight a battle he knows he should fight as a man.

God has designed men to lead his people. And it's the same in the NC. All the apostles are men - even the ones who come after these initial 12. **Turn to Rom. 16** for a moment. There is a disputed instance where some think that there is actually a woman apostle named Junia. This is an interesting argument that they make, but ultimately I'm not convinced of this.

Here Paul is giving us a list of people in the Roman churches that he wants to greet. And he says this in **Vs. 7. Read**

ESV: Greet Andronicus and Junia...**they** are well known to the apostles.

NASB/NIV: Greet...they are outstanding among the apostles.

The question what does it mean that they are well know among the apostles? It could mean that she is well know **as an apostle herself**. Or it could mean that she is well know by the apostles.

Tom Brady is well known among the Seahawks. Does that make Tom Brady a Seahawk? No. DK Metcalf is also well known among the Seahawks. Is DK a Seahawk? Yes.

That's what's being argued here. Junia is well known among the apostles **as an apostle herself**. There's a couple of problems with that. First, while the language could possibly mean that, it would be some of the most awkward Greek in the NT to make it mean that. That's why most translations make it clear: she is known **by** the apostles or **to** the apostles.

Second, if she is well known **as an apostle** why is this the only place we ever hear about her? She's in the back of Romans listed in the middle of a first century phone book of people.

Third, it would go contrary to everything else we read in the NT about authority in the church for a woman to have authority and teach.

Now, why does this even matter? Well, the argument would go: if a woman can be an apostle and have authority over all the churches, then certainly a woman can be a pastor and have authority over one church. They would say that since it seems clear that Junia is an apostle, women can be pastors. You'll find this argument in many mainline, liberal denominations who ordain women as pastors.

Again, what's at stake is authority. And God, in his design, has granted authority to men in the church.

Does that make women of lesser importance or value in God's church? Absolutely not. There are plenty of ways that women can serve. It's just that he's designed men to lead.

And if I may say: men, you are designed to lead. In love and grace and humility and gentleness in our homes, in our families. God places the burden of loving leadership on the men.

And - if God has so called you - to lead in the Church as well. We can't neglect that and we should pursue that if God has called you to those positions you are required to lead well for his glory.

So there are no religious leaders among the apostles. No family members, no Gentiles, and no women. We know who they're not. Who are they? Let's go **back to Mark 3**.

Let me just make a few general observations and then briefly look at these men.

1) They are diverse. They are diverse in several ways. They are diverse in their personality and their spiritual gifts and their backgrounds. And God uses all of them for his glory. There's no one type of leader here, there's no "one model" that is required. God uses introverted and extroverted people, he uses fishermen and government workers and others all for his glory.

Good and godly leaders can come from anywhere, with any background, with a variety of skill sets as long as they are close with Jesus.

2) They are likely very young. Except for Peter who is married and likely mid 20s, we are not told the age of these men. But it is likely they are late teens to middle 20s as they follow Jesus who is himself only 30 when he begins his ministry. Maybe for you high schoolers and kids that seems old - but basically anyone over 35 knows that 30 is relatively young in the grand scheme of things. And certainly late teens or mid 20s is awfully young to be in a position of such crucial leadership but this is who Jesus uses.

One of my friends has joked that Jesus and the 12 apostles is more like Jesus and his youth group. Or maybe more like Jesus and his young adult group. These were not old and wise and established men in society whom God used to turn the world upside down.

1 Tim 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.

In God's Kingdom your impact is not based on your age. You can be young and lead by what you say, what you do, how you love, and you walk with Jesus in purity. He used these 12 very young guys to change the world. He can use you.

3) Another crucial aspect of these men is that they are teachable. All of them are willing to learn. Another word for the apostles that is often used of the 12 is the disciples. Disciple is matheteis in the Greek - it means a learner. When they were called to follow Jesus they became lifelong learners. They didn't know it all, but they were committed to learning everything they could about Jesus.

In the next chapter they will come to Jesus in humility and express confusion over his teaching. They don't know everything there is to know **but they want to learn**.

Even Peter talking about Paul's letters 30 years after Jesus's resurrection says that some of the things Paul says are hard to comprehend. It's not all clear as a bell. But they learn and grow just as we are called to learn and grow.

4) They are fallible. At some point all these men fail and sin and are wrong. Peter will rebuke Jesus for talking about crucifixion. Thomas will doubt that Jesus rose. James and John will argue over which of them should be honored most in Jesus's Kingdom.

They are hopeless. Except that Jesus stays with them and matures them and uses them. Do you ever feel hopeless and like God can't use you? He used these guys - he can use anyone if they are willing to follow in faithfulness.

Peter - Peter is the de facto leader and spokesman for the group. We give Peter a hard time for the things he says but I think he's just bold enough to express what the rest of the group is thinking. And he's likely the oldest in the group so there may be an expectation that he speaks for them.

He and **Andrew** are brothers. They're from Bethsaida which is next to the Sea of Galilee - about 1 o'clock on the dial. They're both fishermen from a family of fishermen.

James and John are both outspoken. They are called the sons of thunder, likely because they were a little quick to rush to judgement and very outspoken about that judgement. They wanted Jesus to stop other people from casting out demons and wanted to call down fire to consume a village in Samaria (**Luke 9:49-54**). They were volatile, but they matured. And even in youth John was called the disciple whom Jesus loved.

In **Vs. 17** James is likely the first martyr of the group. Herod kills him in **Acts 12:1-2**.

The others we know little about except when they are occasionally mentioned as bringing people to Jesus. Matthew is a tax collector of course. Thomas doubted the Lord, but is also the first to actually call Jesus God specifically. When he does put his hand in Jesus's side and hands he exclaims "My Lord and my God!"

And of course there is Judas. Judas is the most infamous of all the disciples because he betrayed Jesus. The week of Passover the religious leaders wanted to arrest Jesus but they couldn't during the day time because the crowds would have protected Jesus. The only way they could do it was at night. The problem was that Jesus was staying at night on the Mount of Olives that would have been packed with people camping for the Passover.

There was no way to find Jesus in the middle of the night to arrest him without causing a massive commotion. That's where Judas came in. He was an insider. He knew exactly where Jesus was and in the middle of the night could lead soldiers to arrest Jesus without making a massive scene and without the crowds knowing.

And he did it for 30 dollars. Judas, who had seen the miracles of Jesus and the love of Jesus. Who sat next to Jesus and slept near Jesus for 3 years. He knew Jesus was the real deal, he knew Jesus was the Son of God - at least mentally. He knew Jesus wasn't a fraud. He knew the power over demons that Jesus had given him. Saw the purity of Jesus.

He was likely good friends with the other apostles - they hung out all the time and basically lived and travelled with each other.

But in the end he was a betrayer. It's odd to end on the note of Judas. It kind of ruins the beauty of what Jesus is doing with the others. But I think it's good to end here.

And with an encouragement to ensure that you are in the faith. That you're not a Judas. Someone who appears to be part of the people of God. Someone who appears to know Jesus or serve Jesus. Someone who looks like a disciple but are not actually.

All the disciples betrayed Jesus that night. Did you know that? They all fled even after promising they wouldn't. You know the difference between them and Judas?

The others repented for their sin and turned back to Jesus.

Pray