

The Twelve Apostles - Mark 3:13-19

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Being the first one picked out of a group makes us feel special. Doesn't it? I remember in school when we would pick teams for kickball, volleyball, or some other team sport. It seemed that the athletic kids were usually chosen to be the captains. Sometimes they would start by picking the ones they thought were the better players. Other times they just seemed to pick the ones they happened to be buddy-buddy with that particular day. I don't ever remember being one of the captains. But I do remember wondering how long it would take for one of the captains to pick me. I would stand and watch as the names were called: "Jason!" "Reese!" "Wesley!" I waited until I heard my name called: "Travis!" It felt good if I was one of the first ones picked. But if my name was one of the last ones called, I didn't feel so good.

Our story today pictures Jesus picking twelve men to be on His team. They were chosen out of the thousands in the large crowd mentioned in our previous story. These men must have felt pretty special. Before we consider their experience let's bow our heads for prayer.

Let's begin with a summary of today's story: *Jesus chose twelve men to work alongside Him. His plan was to send them out to preach. These men would also receive authority to heal and cast out demons.*

Most of our story consists of the names of the twelve men Jesus called. But before we consider who these men were, let's briefly look at what Jesus experienced. First, He experienced selecting 12 men. Up to this point there had been only five disciples. But in our story today Jesus increases the number to twelve. Mark 3:13 says that Jesus "called those He Himself wanted". He personally hand-picked these men. They were the ones He specifically wanted to train for ministry out of the thousands who were following Him. The word Mark uses that's translated "called" has the idea of summoning someone. It pictures someone looking over a group of people and saying a certain person, "You, come here!" These twelve men were those who had made an impression. The response in their hearts to His teaching had caught His attention. Each one Jesus summoned accepted the call. Not one refused.

Second, Jesus experienced forming a missionary team. In Mark 3:14 it says Jesus "appointed twelve". The word translated "appointed" means "to do or to make". In a broader application it often means "to form" or to produce fruit". Jesus is not just selecting some men to keep Him company. He is making something that will "produce fruit". He is forming a team of men who will evangelize the world. Mark gives two reasons why Jesus formed this team. First, it was "that they might be with Him" (Mark 3:14). He wanted them to learn from Him. He wanted to mentor them on a very personal basis. A second reason was "that He might send them out..." (Mark 3:15). With this calling Jesus was making them apostles, which means "one who is sent out". They were no longer disciples only. Jesus will equip them to go and do what He Himself has been doing: preaching the gospel, healing the sick, and casting out demons.

Third, Jesus experienced returning to Capernaum. In Mark 3:19 it says "they went into a house". That may seem rather insignificant. But usually when Mark refers to them entering "a house" or "the house" he is referring to Simon's house, which was in Capernaum. So at the close of the day, Jesus and His twelve apostles leave the mountains (Mark 3:13) to the west of the Sea of Galilee, and go a short distance to the north where Capernaum is located.

Mark mentions by name each of the twelve men Jesus summoned. As much as possible in the time we have let's consider who each of these men were. The first one mentioned is Simon. Mark says Jesus gave him the name Peter, which means "a stone". We'll see shortly why Jesus may have given him this name. There are four lists of the twelve apostles given in the Bible. In each of these four lists Simon (or Peter) is mentioned first. He seems in many ways to have been the leader in the group. We have already learned that his house was the headquarters for Jesus' ministry in Galilee. I invite you to turn with me to Matthew 16. Jesus has asked the disciples what people are saying about Him. And they tell Him that most people think He is one of

the prophets. Jesus then asks them who they think He is. Notice who responds in verse 16 (Read). Simon acts as the spokesman for the group (and does so repeatedly in other instances). And he gives an inspired response to Jesus' question. He declares that Jesus is not only the Messiah, but the Son of the living God. Well, a little later in the same chapter Jesus is telling the disciples about His approaching suffering, death, and resurrection. Notice who responds in verse 22. We will also read verse 23. (Read) Peter's inspiration was gone. He was now being used by the devil. One minute he was filled with the Spirit. The next he was an instrument of Satan. From these examples (and others) Simon revealed an impulsive spirit. He was like the wind. One minute he was going this way, and the next minute he was going the other way. Perhaps this is why Jesus named him Peter. His personality was unsteady as a rolling stone.

Well, the next two names given are James & John. Mark groups them together. They are brothers. And from the way they are listed and described it is apparent that James was the older brother. He is referred to as the "son of Zebedee" while John is referred to as "the brother of James". Jesus gives these two men different names as He did to Simon. Their name was "Boanerges". This meant "sons of commotion" or "sons of rage". Mark gives a Greek translation: "sons of thunder". Their personalities were quite similar. They both were hot-tempered and out-spoken. You never knew when they might blow up or make a scene. You might be walking along and all of a sudden, "Boom!", just like the thunder. They were like walking time bombs.

The fourth name mentioned is Andrew. He was Simon's younger brother. His personality was quite opposite from that of his brother. He is mentioned only a few times in the gospels, and they are not real outstanding. But to learn a little bit about him, turn with me to John 1:40-42. Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist. He was also one of the two men who were the first to follow Jesus. The first person Andrew told about Jesus was his older brother Simon. Notice what he says. (Read) Andrew was the first one to declare Jesus to be the Messiah. Early on he reveals a defining faith. Although his personality was not as strong as Simon's, his faith seems to be remarkably strong.

The fifth name mentioned is Philip. He is also mentioned in John chapter 1. He followed Jesus early on. That is likely why his name is mentioned after the two visible sets of brothers. Philip is quoted four times in the gospels. And each time his words seem to be filled with doubt and uncertainty. In contrast with Andrew, it seems that Philip was slow to believe. He probably required some extra patience from Jesus.

The sixth name mentioned is Bartholomew. This man is so-called in all four lists of the twelve apostles, which are found in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts. John does not give a full list of the twelve. But he does mention in John 1:45-51 a man named "Nathanael". He is the first person Philip tells about Jesus. Nathanael is also mentioned by John after the resurrection as being with some of the apostles. So, it is believed that Nathanael and Bartholomew is the same person. John mentions that Jesus' first words to Nathanael described him as someone with "no guile". Jesus immediately recognized him as being free from deceit. He must have been a very honest person.

The seventh name mentioned is Matthew. We have already learned from a previous story in Mark that he was also called Levi, which was probably his first name, with Matthew being his last name. We have also learned that he was a tax collector for the Romans, and as a result was not well-liked by most Jews. But he also seems to have been the most grateful. He really appreciated the fact that Jesus had chosen him of all people.

The eighth name mentioned is Thomas. His name means "twin". John gives us a glimpse into the type of person he was in John 20. The apostles were all hiding in a house after Jesus' death. They huddled together behind locked doors hoping no one would find them. At this time it wasn't very popular to be a follower of Jesus. Well, they are all surprised when Jesus suddenly appears. They not only saw Him. They saw His scars. Not let's read verse 24. Why wasn't Thomas there when Jesus appeared? Most believe that it was because he was so depressed. He didn't want to be around anybody else. Most of the time you hear about "doubting Thomas" because of this story. But really, all the disciples doubted. What this story reveals about Thomas was that he was a melancholy. When he was discouraged, he had to be by himself. He didn't gain encouragement or comfort by being around his fellow disciples.

The ninth name mentioned is James the son of Alphaeus. No other record is given of this apostle. The Scriptures are silent regarding this James other than mentioning his name. Some believe that the "James the Less" mentioned in Mark 15:40 was the same person as the James mentioned here in the list of the apostles.

The tenth name mentioned is Thaddeus. In Matthew 10:3 we find that this was his last name, and his first name was Lebbaeus. In the lists of the twelve apostles given in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13 Thaddeus is not mentioned. Judas son of James is listed instead. So it seems that Thaddeus was also known by the name Judas. Other than this, the Scriptures don't mention anything more about him.

The eleventh name mentioned is Simon. He is referred to in Matthew and Mark's lists as "the Canaanite". But this is actually a mistake in translation. The actual word is "cananites", very similar to Canaanite. This word means "jealous". This description makes more sense when we consider the description given to this Simon in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13. Here he is referred to as Simon the Zealot. The Zealots were a 4th sect of Judaism. (in addition to the Sadducees, Pharisees, and Essenes) They were a radical, political group of Jews who fought for independence from Rome. They were militant and violent. Such was Simon's background.

The twelfth and last name mentioned is Judas Iscariot. Most believe that "Iscariot" means "man of Kerioth", which was a southern Judean village. He may have been the only apostle who was not from Galilee. In John 6:71 we learn that Judas' father was Simon, not to be confused with Simon Peter or Simon the Zealot. The one description given of Judas Iscariot is that he was the one who "betrayed" Jesus. This word translated "betrayed" means to "give over". It can be used in a positive sense in which it means "to deliver". It can also have a negative meaning in which someone's freedom is taken away. They are handed over to their enemies. Such was the experience of Judas and Jesus. Judas handed Jesus over to His enemies. We will learn more about this experience in Mark 14.

There is one remarkable way in which Jesus is revealed as our example in this story. He shows what a healthy and dangerous Christian looks like in that He surrounded Himself with diversity. He chose men with strong and conflicting personalities. Peter, James, and John were all outspoken and loud. It is likely that the strong personalities of Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot often created arguments and disputes with the others. Jesus also chose men with differing backgrounds. Matthew worked for Rome. Simon the Zealot killed Romans. These differing backgrounds undoubtedly created some friction in the group. But Jesus was not intimidated by strong personalities. Neither was He afraid to bring people with differing opinions onto the same team. He reveals that a healthy and dangerous Christian is someone who sees diversity as a strength. It is a blessing to be surrounded by people who think differently from me. I grow wiser by being around people who are different from me. If I had married someone just like me (and I clearly did not), one of us would be unnecessary. Life might be easier, but as a team we surely wouldn't be as complete.

The group of twelve men that Jesus picked to be His missionary team was not only diverse but full of issues. They had a lot of faults. Not one understood what Jesus was all about. They all had their own agendas and selfish reasons for following Jesus. While following Jesus they are brought into repeated situations that fill them with fear. They are repeatedly arguing and trying to push their way to the head of the group. Clearly Jesus did not pick them because they were perfect. He does not call the equipped. He equips the called. He doesn't wait until we're perfect. He calls us so that He can make us who we need to be.

In Acts 2:39 Peter makes an incredible statement. He was one of twelve who were called to be on Jesus' team. And in his sermon on the day of Pentecost he says that the promise of the Holy Spirit is for "all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call." Peter uses the same word that Mark uses in our story today. Mark says Jesus "called to Him those He Himself wanted." And Peter says that the Lord will give the Holy Spirit to all those that He calls. In both verses the word translated "call" is also the same Greek word.

So today, Jesus is still calling. He is calling out your name. He wants you to work alongside Him. He wants to equip you to bring healing to a sick and dying world. If you would like to say to the Lord, "I'm in. I accept your call," please stand with me.