

The Apostles of Christ

Mark 3:7-19

Pastor Jeff has read our text for this morning, but I want us to first look at the verse that leads us into this text – which is Mark 3:6, “Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians [who were cheerleaders for the Herods] how they might kill Jesus.” The Pharisees and Herodians hated each other, but they hated Jesus more. And so they decided to work together for the common goal of destroying Christ. But it was not yet time for Christ to die and so we read in Mark 3:7-8 [I am reading from the NIV],

“Jesus withdrew with His disciples [Jesus was not going to make Himself an easy target] **to the lake** [the ESV says “sea” – which in this context is referring to the sea of Galilee, which is a fresh water lake. Therefore either “lake” or “sea” is appropriate. This is not an inspiration issue. What we read next is the primary reason why the Pharisees and Herodians hated Christ], **and a large crowd from Galilee followed** [and this great crowd was not just from Galilee. Look at verse 8]. ⁸ **When they heard all he was doing, many people came to him from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea** [this is the only time Idumea appears in the New Testament. It refers to the an area south of Judah inhabited by the Edomites – who were descendants of Esau and perpetual enemies of Israel], **and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon**” [which were Gentile cities – and historic enemies of Israel.”

Verse 8 let’s us know that the Edomites and the people of Tyre and Sidon were not beyond God’s love and grace. Jesus was extending blessings even to people the Jews considered bad and undesirable. But remember, many of the Jews were no prize either. Friends, in our unregenerate state, none of us deserve God’s blessings. **Romans 5:8**

testifies, “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners [at enmity with God], Christ died for us.” If you are a Christian, it is because of God’s grace, so don’t take any credit for it. If you are not a Christian, it is all your fault, so don’t blame God. And by the way, if you are fighting against God, you will never win.

Let me illustrate that last point by using the Pharisees and Herodians as examples. They were plotting to destroy Jesus because they were jealous of Him. But God was going to use their wicked plans to fulfill His good and sovereign plans. The Apostle Peter expresses this same truth to a Jewish crowd in **Acts 2:23**,

“This man [Jesus] was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you [the Jews], with the help of wicked men [the Romans], put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

Did God force the unbelieving Jews and Romans to crucify Jesus? No. They did that of their own volition. What God did was to raise Christ from the dead and thereby use the wickedness of these people to achieve His redemptive purposes. God can do stuff like that.

At this point in Mark’s Gospel, it would seem that it was the leaders of Israel who were the primary enemies of Christ. The common Jews seemed excited about Him – as were people from all around Israel. But what excited them was not so much what Jesus taught, it was the miracles of healing that drew the crowds. We get a hint of this in verse 8, “When they heard all he was **doing** many people came.” It doesn’t say, “When they heard all he was **teaching** many people came”

Do you remember in Mark 1:44, when Jesus healed the man with

leprosy, he sternly told him, “See that you don’t tell this to anyone.” But we then read in **Mark 1:45**, “Instead he went out and began to talk freely, spreading the news. As a result, Jesus could no longer enter a town openly” Christ’s physical healings drew the crowds, but the primary focus of Jesus was on teaching the truth. This is why Jesus told His disciples in **Mark 1:38**, “Let us go to nearby villages – so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” And this is still the case in Mark 3:9-10,

“Because of the crowd he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him [remember they are at the Sea of Galilee], to keep the people from crowding him [the ESV says, lest they crush him]. ¹⁰ For he had healed many, so that those with diseases were pushing forward to touch him.”

By getting into a small boat, Jesus could speak to the crowd, without being smothered by them. If Jesus had to choose between physically healing people or teaching people truths that could change their eternal destinies, He chose to teach. However, it wasn’t an either/or matter. Jesus continued to heal many people, and show authority over demons – as we are told in verses 11-12,

“Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’ But he gave them strict orders not to tell who he was.”

The evil spirits [fallen angels] knew for a fact that Jesus is the Son of God, but that was not good news for them because their ultimate destiny will be the lake of fire. Fallen angels will never repent. Let’s pause here and think about something. When Jesus was advancing God’s Kingdom by preaching truth and performing many miracles, Satan and his demons were losing ground. **People who had been held in the clutches of**

demonic possession were set free. Conversely, when God's kingdom ended up being rejected by the majority of Israelites, all the demons that Jesus had cast out, along with many other demons more wicked than they, came back and inhabited many unbelieving Jews [Matthew 12:43-45]. My point is, when Christ's Kingdom was advancing, Satan's kingdom was suffering loss. I bring this out because I hear many Christians saying that both Christ's Kingdom and Satan's kingdom can prosper at the same time and in the same location. That was certainly not true of Israel.

Ultimately, there are only two kingdoms in this world. The kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness. One kingdom advances at the expense of the other. Tell me if this is not true: Light overcomes darkness. Turn on a flash light at night, and darkness retreats before it's light. The problem of our culture today is not the abundance of darkness. It is the scarcity of light. And the scarcity of light is because many Christians have privatized their faith – whereas Jesus said let your light shine. Our culture and our politics need the light of Christianity.

Let me take you now to the heart of our text for this morning. Look with me at verses 13-15,

“Jesus [the greater than Moses] went up on a mountainside [just as Moses did] and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. ¹⁴ He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be **with him** [to learn from Him life transforming truths and attitudes] and that he might **send them out to preach** ¹⁵ and to have authority to **drive out demons.**”

The word apostle comes from the Greek verb apostello. It means to send, to dispatch someone in order to accomplish a mission. The mission

of the twelve was to proclaim by word and deed the life-transforming truths they had been taught. In John 17:18, Jesus Himself is referred to as an apostle – a sent one. Who sent Christ? God the Father. What was His mission? As the second Adam, He was to live a perfect life of obedience, and extend the blessings of God’s kingdom by teaching, healing, casting out demons, and by being the perfect sacrifice for our sins. But we should never forget that making disciples who in turn were committed to making disciples, was a major part of Christ’s mission. Listen to Christ’s prayer to God the Father in **John 17:4-18**, just days before His death,

“I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do [listen to the particular work Christ was referring to] . . . ⁶ I have revealed you to those whom you gave me . . . ⁷ Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. ⁸ For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me . . . ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one . . . ¹⁸ As you sent me [as an apostle] into the world, I have sent them [as apostles] into the world.”

The last command Jesus gave to His disciples, just before His ascension, was to make disciples of all the nations. That is an enormous mission that has been moving forward for the last 2,000 years. Listen carefully to what I say next: Christ’s appointment of the twelve disciples, is one of the most significant events in the history of the world.

In preparation for this message I googled the question, “What are the ten most important events in world history?” There are a number of answers to that question, but some events make just about everybody’s list. Here are some that made the lists that I looked at: The American

Revolution (1775-1783). It not only altered the course of our nation, but sent shock waves into all the world, which are still being felt today. And many of the people who originally came to America, came to find freedom to follow the Christ of the Bible. And how did they know the Christ of the Bible? Because of the work which the twelve began.

Another event that made the list was the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, which is still bearing fruit today. Again it is the Christ of the Bible that stirred that event, which means the work of the twelve was also instrumental in that great movement.

Let me mention one more that I already knew was going to be on the list, and that was Gutenberg's printing press in the 1450s. It opened the door for the economical, wide-spread printing of books and sharing of knowledge from generation to generation and continent to continent. It is considered the milestone of the second millennium, credited for making the Reformation possible and the explosion of scientific advances. And do you know the first book that was printed on the Gutenberg press? It was the Bible. And friends, we would not have a completed Bible apart from the twelve Apostles. Listen to the promise Jesus spoke to the twelve in **John 14:26**,

“But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

The Gospel of Mark comes from the conversations that Mark had with Peter and other Apostles. Even the Apostle Paul submitted the gospel he preached to the Apostles at Jerusalem [Galatians 2:7-9].

Why did Christ choose twelve Apostles? Why not ten or fifteen? I believe it was to show the continuity between the Old Covenant and New Covenant. Under the Old Covenant, God called twelve tribes of Israelites to be in covenant with Him, to follow and serve Him and be a light to the world. And there was always a remnant of Jews who stayed true to that call. From this remnant, Christ called twelve disciples to follow and serve Him and be a light to the world. Let's read their names again in vv 16-19,

“These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter – rock. Peter’s name appears far more times in the New Testament than all the other disciples combined – about 163 times);¹⁷ James son of Zebedee [his name appears about 25 times] and his brother John (24 times by name, although he is also referred to as the disciple Jesus loved. Notice what is said next] – to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder. [Does anyone remember how they may have gotten that name? In Luke 9:54, a village in Samaria refused to offer hospitality to Christ – so James and John asked Jesus if they should call down fire from heaven to consume them? Jesus rebuked them at the time, but I think later it may have become an inside joke among the disciples, “Oh no, here come the sons of thunder, we better all take cover.”];¹⁸ Andrew [Peter’s brother appears 13 times in the New Testament], Philip [16 times], Bartholomew [4 times], Matthew [5 times], Thomas [also known as Didymus 12 times – because of his initial refusal to believe that Jesus had risen from the dead], James son of Alphaeus [4 times], Thaddaeus [also known as Judas son of James [2 times], Simon the Zealot [4 times. Simon went from being a religious zealot about following the Ceremonial Laws of Moses – to being a follower of the One who fulfilled the Ceremonial Law and made it obsolete],¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.”

How would you like to go down in history with that little tag beside your name? If you are like me, you maybe thinking, didn't Christ pray all night before He selected the twelve? And did we not just read that Christ

desired all twelve of these men? Did Jesus mess up when He selected Judas Iscariot? No. Well then that must mean that Judas was selected for the specific purpose of betraying Christ. No. Judas was given a tremendous opportunity to help change the world by faithfully making disciples for Christ. He blew it. Like all the apostles, he was confused when Christ did not behave as they were taught the Messiah would behave. In their understanding, the Messiah was to be a king over Israel. As their King, He would make Israel the head of all the nations, who would come to Jerusalem to worship at the wonderful stone temple the Jews had made. That was not Jesus' plan. As a matter of fact, Jesus's perfect sacrifice for our sins, made the stone temple at Jerusalem obsolete. Judas Iscariot did not just become confused, he got angry. How dare Jesus not behave as expected. Judas was also angry about his financial standing. Look with me at **John 12:2-6**,

“ . . . a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.”

God did not make Judas Iscariot an angry person. But God did use his anger to accomplish His plans and purposes – just as He used the wicked plans of the Pharisees and Herodians. I am grateful that God can make everything, even my failures, work together for good [Romans 8:28]. But

should I do wrong, so God can show His power in making good come from it? Of course not. We should always desire to do what is right. Christians can sometimes miss the best, because we settle for the good.

Judas Iscariot was enormously blessed, but he was not grateful or teachable. And because he did not repent of those character flaws, he fell by the way. And so Christians, one of the reasons we gather together is to encourage and help each other be grateful and teachable people, who are faithful to the mission started by the twelve. If we are going to be faithful to that mission, then we should be spending time with Christ in His Word, so we can learn of Him and have Him transform our lives from being self-centered, into being other-centered, so that the world may know that Christ is the Son of God. Let's pray.