

THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE DISCIPLES

Mk. 3:14 And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, ¹⁵ And to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils.

With the coming of Jesus, a time of change was taking place in the land of Israel. The old Covenant that had been given through Moses had become corrupted and forsaken by the ruling religious class, comprising of the Pharisees, Sadducees, scribes, rabbis, and priests. It was no longer fit for purpose, and had turned into an apostate religion that no longer honoured God. Consequently, when Jesus arrived on the scene He exposed the inadequacies of the *Old Covenant* and introduced the *New Covenant*.

As part of His purpose He ‘ordained’ twelve of the most unlikely individuals ... none of whom came from the religious world. Not one of them was a theologian, or an academic. Not one of them had even the remotest links with Pharisees, priests, or Sadducees. The word ‘ordained’ is used to translate the very common Greek word ποιέω, which is better translated ‘appointed’ ... *And he [appointed] twelve.* ... They did not go through some kind of training where they had to pass a test to become a disciple, - Jesus simply had *decided* on them, *called* them and *made* them into His disciples.

And, indeed, you could not have imagined a more implausible group of men with which to confront the religious establishment. The New Covenant Kingdom of Messiah bore no relation whatsoever to the backslidden Judaism ... and it was no wonder the religious elite very quickly condemned Jesus and His associates. Of necessity, they needed to for He was a *threat* to their stability.

But, as far as the Jewish religious leaders were concerned, they knew God and they believed in what they were doing. They were convinced they knew what God wanted, and they were carrying out His desires, and upholding their traditions. However, nothing could have been further from the truth, for as Jesus explained to them on another occasion, Jn. 8:42 *If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. 43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. 44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.* This was a very forthright manner Jesus used to confront them ... but they needed to be told!

Jesus, therefore, had adopted a very contentious course of action ... and no wonder it was attracting such acrimony. However, there was no other way of doing it for He had to face the problem ‘head-on’. His time was short, and the task was formidable.

So, in establishing His new covenant, He was repudiating these Jewish leaders for rejecting God, rejecting the Word of God, and rejecting Him, the Son of God. ... Then when Jesus began His ministry, the religion of Judaism that had descended into a religion of men was being set aside in favour of the Gospel of grace.

And, the days were fast approaching when the New Covenant Gospel would be preached powerfully throughout the land. The Gospel of repentance and forgiveness of sin by faith in Christ alone, His substitutionary and vicarious death on the cross, His resurrection from the grave would be expounded from the Old Testament Scriptures, commencing on the Day of Pentecost. ... The preaching of the Gospel would annul the Old Covenant and establish Christ as the Messiah.

You see, this was the plan of Jesus, in accordance with the will of His Father, for in the Garden of Gethsemane He prayed, [Jn. 17:4 I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.](#) He was fully aware He was working to a timetable. He knew His public ministry had a short lifespan, - only 3½ years ... and for that ministry to achieve the purposes of the Godhead and to continue, He had to appoint and train His disciples. His work involved making ready this group of twelve by teaching them how to carry on what He had started. They were chosen to present His Gospel after He had gone.

How were they trained? Mark explains how in v.14, [that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach.](#) In other words, the teaching for their personal witness concerning Jesus was done through their daily contact with Him, their personal knowledge of Him. When He would be no longer with them, they would look back and ask, “What would Jesus have done?”

They knew, - or, at least He had told them often enough, - He wasn't always going to be with them ... and that was why they had to listen and to learn from the Master. They witnessed personally His ministry, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension, as Peter recalled, [II Peter 1:16 we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.](#) There was no second-hand knowledge being passed on from someone else. Each of these disciples had a personal knowledge of the power and presence of the Saviour, and it was with *that* knowledge they brought to others the Gospel. ...

And it was also with that knowledge, He commissioned them, Mk. 16:15 Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel.

Who were they again? They were the most ordinary people ... and yet, that is the kind God uses. What kind is that? It is the kind, - no matter what their station in life, - is taken by the Lord and saved ... in order to serve Him. There is none too high up the social ladder, and there is none too low ... but everyone who God saves is saved to serve Him.

But so often, though, the disciples were 'looked down upon'. Paul explains the reason, I Cor. 1:18 the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹ For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent [*cf. Is. 29:14*]. He is not counting cleverness by using man's reasoning or estimation, v.20 Where *is* the wise? where *is* the scribe? where *is* the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?

And then, Paul told the believers who were wavering in their faith, v.26 For ye see your calling, brethren, - he was reminding them to take a good look of examination at their personal calling into the work of Christ. It didn't matter what their fellow-countrymen thought of their decision to follow Christ ... it was the greatest and highest calling and privilege! They were so different to the unbelieving and godless idol worshippers in the wealthy and self-promoting city of Corinth for Christ had saved them out of it!

True, in the estimation of their countrymen, they wouldn't have been considered as the most intelligent (σοφός) for following Jesus, or the most mighty (δυνατός), or the most noble (εὐγενής i.e. well born, of the highest stock). They, - as far the city-people were concerned, - had thrown away their privilege, and anything they had built up for themselves had been lost, as far as the godless were concerned. *But*, wrote Paul, here is what God has done for you in Christ, v.27 God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; ²⁸ And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: ²⁹ That no flesh should glory in his presence.

Indeed, that was how Paul referred to himself when he wrote, I Cor. 2:1 And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. ² For I determined not to know any thing

among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³ And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. ⁴ And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: ⁵ That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. ... And yet, Paul could have boasted about his upbringing, and his excellent rabbinic education at the feet of the great and distinguished teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3).

Look also at the sermon preached in Jerusalem, Acts 4:10 Be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, *even* by him doth this man stand here before you whole. ¹¹ This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. ¹² Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. ... What a message! Who preached it? A fisherman, assisted by another fisherman, Acts 4:13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus. ... That was the substance of their training, they had been with Jesus.

I think we would be fairly safe in saying none of us will ever get preaching in St. Paul's Cathedral or in Westminster Abbey, - we wouldn't be of the proper calibre. For if we were to stand up in such institutions, there would be a strong possibility we would attract the same derisory comments as Peter and John. What we would be preaching would be considered foolishness and absurdity.

And yet, here are these disciples whom Christ had called and chosen to preach the Gospel concerning Him, the New Covenant, and His Kingdom. Through their stuttering and various limitations would go forth the good news of salvation. Often you might think there is so very little, - if anything, - you can do for the Saviour, but every man and woman He saves, He saves in order for them to serve. You don't need to belong to some elite group of theologians and Bible expositors, - God uses them too ... those who are faithful in the proclamation of His Word, - but more often He uses the ordinary people ... and that was what the twelve disciples were. ... Their 'feet were on the ground', their hearts belonged to the Lord, and their tongues spoke of His glory.

We are not called to preach ourselves, or to present anyone other than Christ and His Gospel. He took our sins upon His own body on the cross, and He took the punishment from God that we ought to have taken, and He endured the pain and distress of being abandoned by His Father, and He suffered the humility of the taunts and insults of His people, and through the sacrifice of His precious body on the cross, His blood was shed to wash away our sins. ...

We don't preach the Gospel because we are Baptists ... we preach the Gospel because the Lord has saved us. We don't promote ourselves, we present *Him* for without Him we would be heading to a lost eternity in Hell. We present Him as being the living and powerful Saviour, working through His Church today. We present Him as the Lord Who will soon return for His people. He is our personal Friend, the risen, glorified, crowned King of Glory ... and He's our Saviour!

And these twelve disciples, - who shared almost every day during a three-and-a-half year period with Jesus, - saw what He did, and listened to what He said ... What a training ... straight from the Master! That was how they could preach on the Day of Pentecost and the days thereafter, assisted by the Holy Spirit Who came upon them in power. Ordinary people ... yet chosen of God! Go and gather in the prayer meeting, they were told ... and so they did. They all went into the upper room where they prayed earnestly, - probably the same upper room where the Lord Jesus ate the last supper with them ... What were they praying for there? ... For Christ to come back immediately? For the opposition of the Jews to subside? For the Jewish leaders to be saved so as to influence others? No, they had remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, [Jn. 16:7](#) *It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you, - That is He had gone away, and now they were waiting and praying for the Holy Spirit to arrive in His place!*

And *who* was gathered in the upper room, waiting in expectancy, and anticipating? [Acts 1:13](#) *they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.* ¹⁴ *These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. ... The disciples whom Jesus had called were there. And as a consequence of their faithfulness in preparation, the Spirit came upon them and thousands were saved as God honoured the preaching of the Apostles whom He had called as the exponents of the New Covenant that had its fulfilment in Christ.*

The Day of Pentecost began with three thousands being saved, and then five thousands ... Unheard of previously! Does God do that anymore? Yes, He does ... and even in greater numbers! There are parts of this world today where there is a great ingathering of precious souls ... more today than at any other time throughout the history of this world! Sadly, we are not seeing it here in the West; that is because, - I believe, - we have grieved the Holy Spirit by exchanging the Gospel of Christ for a 'gospel' of men. God is judging us.

But, when God mobilises His people ... as He was intending to do here with His disciples, He accomplishes all He has set out in His plan.

Look at them again, - they were starting as learners/students/disciples, but Christ would ensure they would graduate as apostles. Throughout their training simplicity was at the heart of their work for Him ... Nothing fancy, and nothing complicated ... simply following Him in obedience. They were there where He told them to be, and He poured His power upon them day after day. That is how He works, - the more you share His company, the more you come to be like Him. It is as simple as that, Mt. 4:19 Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men ... Jn. 12:26 If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will *my* Father honour ... *If only we would listen and learn!*

So, that is what was happening here ... ordinary men were being turned into servants of Jesus, disciples. They would become the first generation preachers of the New Covenant, - they were the first Gospel evangelists of the new era, preaching salvation through the Name of Christ alone. No longer fishermen, freedom fighters, or tax-collectors ... but servants of the King in the establishment of His new Kingdom.

Do you know what Jesus had been doing the night before He appointed the twelve? Luke 6 is the corresponding chapter, and in verse twelve, - before He called His disciples in verse thirteen, verse twelve tells us, *He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.* ... Every person He called, He had already prayed for. They were chosen and commissioned as a consequence of His Father's will ... Jesus was praying for them, and that is what He continues to do for His Church today, He *also maketh intercession for us* (Rom. 8:34). He prays for us all the time.

And even when He was in the garden of Gethsemane the evening before His crucifixion ... even in the midst of His sorrow and struggles, He prayed for us, Jn. 17:1 *Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: 2 As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. 3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.* He prayed from dusk to dawn for His disciples, and He continues to pray for the efforts of His people today. He is our Great High Priest. He knew the Father's will, and so He always prays knowing exactly what to pray for, and how to pray. ...

He knows the state the world is in today, and He knows every one of His saints, and where they are ... and He prays that we all would be faithful regardless of the challenges around us and facing us. ... Jesus was praying for His disciples, with the same determination He prays for us. ... He knows the signs are pointing towards His soon return ... and He is praying in Heaven for His Redeemed on earth.

That, then, is why we ought not to raise obstacles to His prayers. It is why we ought not to put hindrances in the way of His will. Serve Him as you ought. That is what He saved you for, - to serve Him, - and for that purpose He will one day call you to account. How we must remember that one out of those twelve disciples did not gain entry into Heaven ... even though He had been called by Jesus, even though He had experienced the example of Jesus, even though he had been taught by Jesus, even though he was in the company of the other disciples, and even though he had heard and seen and was a part of what Jesus had done. ... Indeed, *there* is a warning concerning the foolishness of Judas Iscariot!

Appreciate your calling, for the plan to bring it about was at a great cost to our Saviour. *Are* you saved? *Are* you truly saved? *Are* you a faithful disciple? ... If you are saved, Christ expects you to be a disciple, a follower ... and not in word only, but also in actions. *What* does a disciple do? ... A disciple serves the Master ... not on his/her own, for that is the example we are shown here concerning the disciples of Jesus ... we are to serve Him with those He sets alongside us. He gave these disciples authority together to **heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils**, - they knew and experienced the power of God in their lives. They stood apart as servants of Christ, and God enabled them to do what they never imagined prior to meeting Him. They were changed and converted into new men ... doing their work for the Master, and set apart for Him.

Once again, we haven't gotten very far in our study, but these are fundamental and important aspects of our service for Christ that we must examine. What kind of a disciple would we have made if we had lived in those days and Jesus had called us? ... And what kind of disciples, - followers, - of Christ are we today? *Are* we living up to His expectations? It is just a simple question and yet it is one we need to answer truthfully for the sake of His glory and for the certainty of our assurance in His salvation. Amen.