

## AMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST (Mark 3:14-19)

To understand Scripture we must appreciate it within the context of its history. Otherwise, we strip it of its background and we end up arriving at unreliable conclusions. It is only when we take the time to explore the immediate settings we can apply its lessons more accurately to our own times and our own situations. This, therefore, places every verse and every chapter and every book of the Bible into '*real-time*'. God says nothing in His Word that is irrelevant, for *all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness (II Tim. 3:16)*. It does not matter what century we live in, or what part of the world ... the Scriptures speak into *every* situation.

Undoubtedly, we live in an increasingly multi-cultural society. However, the times in which Jesus lived were also multi-cultural. Nowadays we talk about cultural diversity and demographics, and how they impact upon our country, and how they result in changes of direction, values, and principles. ... Jesus lived in the midst of such 'progress' too.

Society was not only multi-cultural, it was also multi-religious. ... There was the Jewish faith that had been prominent in the land for over one thousand years. There were also the Romans with *their* idolatry, the Greeks with *their* idolatry, and the surrounding nations with their paganism. Altogether, it blended into a polytheistic syncretism. Outside of all this were the Pharisees who were fighting hard to maintain their traditions of Judaism, for they feared being overrun by the other religions ... Trying to understand it from the Jewish perspective, it was a struggle for the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin to maintain their grip over the people and to uphold their Judaism. ... And that is why they saw Jesus as another threat.

So, society was multi-cultural, multi-religious, and also multi-lingual. This developed because of the people from foreign lands who had come to live in Israel. A great number of these 'incomers' had much to say about how the country was to be run. Not only were the Jews in the land, but there were also the Roman conquerors, Greeks, North Africans, and many others from throughout the region. Consequently, many languages were spoken.

The main language, - the formal language of the Jewish authorities, the language of officialdom, - was Hebrew. As you know, the Old Testament was written in Hebrew, except for about 250 verses mostly in Daniel and Ezra that were written in another language, Aramaic ...

Aramaic was spoken over a wide area by the Semitic people, - the descendants of Abraham, - of Isaac and Ishmael. It was further broken down into local dialects, and Jesus, for example, spoke with a Galilean Aramaic dialect, for example, Mk. 5:41 *Talitha cumi ... Damsel ... arise ...* 15:34 *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*

So, Jesus would have spoken Hebrew and Aramaic ... He also would have spoken Latin because the area in which He grew up had a large Roman population, many of whom lived in a city called Sepphoris. We also read about Him speaking to the Roman centurion (Mt. 8:5-13), whose language would have been Latin.

Also, just over three hundred years before Christ, Alexander the Great, - a Greek, - had conquered and settled many of his soldiers in the land of Israel under a policy known as ‘hellenization’. They married the local Jewish girls and brought the children up as young ‘Greeks’. Therefore, Greek was a common and familiar language. In fact, the whole area, from Galilee up to the north and north-west and north-east was a highly commercial region where the official language of business was Greek.

This, then, was the background of the region where Jesus grew up ... in this multi-cultural, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-lingual society where the languages of Greek, Latin, Hebrew and Aramaic were spoken. ... Indeed, on the superscription over His cross the words were written in Greek, Latin and Hebrew, “This is the King of the Jews” (Lk. 23:38)

Does this kind of society in which Jesus lived ‘ring any bells’ ...? Do you find it hard imagining such a place?!

One of the many Greek words we all know is ‘apostle’. ‘Apostle’ is the translation of ἀποστέλλω, to send forth, to send someone to a particular place for a particular task. It was a common word, in fact, the first time it was used in the New Testament was for a *secular* purpose, Mk. 2:16 *Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wrath, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem.*

The word for ‘apostle’, though, is actually the translation of an *Aramaic* word [*shaliah*]. It was first used in the Old Testament within the context of the servant who was ‘sent forth’ by his master Abraham to find a wife for Isaac.

In the New Testament, when John the Baptist was carrying out baptisms in the River Jordan, we read, [John 1:19](#) *And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent [forth] [ἀποστέλλω] priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? ...* This was a Jewish delegation *sent forth* from the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem to investigate what John was doing. They were official ‘emissaries’ [*shaliah*], who were sent out with a mission to report back to their masters in Jerusalem what they saw and heard.

Following on from this Jewish Sanhedrin concept of the *shaliah*, the title ἀπόστολος was developed and used by Paul and the disciples to describe their mission of being ‘sent forth’ by Jesus. They knew what this term meant ... For example, Paul was a Jew who had belonged to the Sanhedrin, so he would have known and understood the full implications of this word ... And when he became a Christian he used it with the emphasis on what Christ had set aside and called him to be and to do, for when he introduced himself, for example, to the Romans he wrote, [Paul, a servant \[δοῦλος\] of Jesus Christ, called \[κλητός\] to be an apostle \[ἀπόστολος\], separated \[ἀφορίζω\] unto the gospel of God ...](#) That was how the disciples and the Church understood the word. They were emissaries and ambassadors of Christ, called out and chosen to be His disciples, with the sole purpose of living the rest of their lives set apart in His service. ...

What a calling! ... What a responsibility! What a privilege! They were representatives, - *ambassadors for Christ*, that was the description Paul used in [II Cor. 5:20](#). They stood in the place of Jesus. They spoke on His behalf. Formerly ordinary men from ordinary backgrounds, they were given power by the Messiah, the Son of God, and promoted into the service of the King of kings ... Royal ambassadors! Incredible! They had been lifted out of obscurity and set before the world with a message from Heaven!

There is an interesting little feature regarding how at least two of the disciples started off with Jesus. We usually emphasise Peter and Andrew’s calling by the side of the Sea of Galilee, - and that is true, - but actually the first time they met Jesus was a few months earlier, down by the River Jordan. In [Jn. 1:37](#) two disciples watched from the riverbank as Jesus went into the water at His baptism. They watched the glory of God descending upon Him in the form of a dove, and the next day John pointed out to two disciples, [v.36 Behold the Lamb of God!](#) These two disciples then began to follow Jesus, whilst they remained for a time in that area.

One of those two disciples was Andrew (v.40), and he went and told his brother Simon, *We have found the Messiah* (v.41). Peter then came and met Jesus also. They spent time with the Lord, and they *believed* in Him. They recognised Him to be the Messiah ... Peter and Andrew then returned home to Galilee.

A few months later Jesus Himself travelled northwards, to find them. Now, the difference between the first time they met Jesus, - by the River Jordan, - and the second time, - in Galilee, - was that after they met Him the first time in the Jordan region they returned to their fishing, but it was after the second time, - by the Sea of Galilee, they left their nets and became full-time followers. ... And that is when they became disciples. They were with Jesus twenty-four hours seven days a week. ... They heard all He said and saw all He did, and with the personal knowledge they had of Him, He would send them out as apostles and as emissaries to preach His Good News.

We can *never* come to know so much about Christ that we can afford to 'switch off'. No matter how much studying you do, you realise how little you know about it all. The disciples were with Jesus for three-and-a-half years ... and it went by 'in a flash'! They could not hope to know everything about Him in such a short period of time ... and yet, what they had come to know directed their future ministry. They *gloried* in belonging to Him, - He had 'made His indelible mark' upon them ... for example, Peter described himself, *I Peter 1:1, Peter, and apostle of Jesus Christ* ... *II Peter 1:1 Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ*. ... That was how they were known, and how they *wanted* to be identified, for the sake of Christ's ministry through them!

And the message He would *send them forth to preach* was none other than the message of the Gospel of the Kingdom. They weren't going out to change the world with a social agenda ... they went out to preach the message of salvation in Christ alone, - nothing more, and nothing less! That is the only commission we have, - Christ is King, and Thy Kingdom come! Yes, it is nice to help people, and it is part of our remit as Christians, but when it becomes the overriding factor ... then it is wrong ... It is not what Christ has called us to do. ... Jesus made it very clear, *Mk. 14:7 ye have the poor with you always, and whensoever ye will ye may do them good: but me ye have not always*. In other words, Christ is the priority, and no matter how good another project might seem, it will inevitably and ultimately get in the way of presenting the Gospel message He has sent us with!

How sad it is to see organisations that started off well ... preaching the Gospel, ... but other issues have taken over and made their way to the front of the agenda, and they have squeezed out the primary purpose for the Christian which is to proclaim the Gospel.

That is not how it ought to be. ... Jesus could have gone from place to place feeding thousands, - He could have done it every day of His public ministry, - but that was not His purpose in coming. ... How we need to know what Christ has called us to! ... He *has* called us ... There is not one single person He has saved that He has not called to serve Him. And we are not to run around trying to figure out how to serve Him ... for He tells us in His Word how to do it! ... He sent them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils (v.13,14) ... and by the time they did that, they had enough to do! They couldn't afford to allow other things to get in the way of what Christ had called them for!

*There's* a lesson ... a lesson for us each individually, and also as a church! We are to be faithful in what Christ has called us to do ... to spread the Gospel in obedience to His Word!

Then, we have the mention of the twelve disciples (Mk. 3:13-19; also, Mt. 10:2-4; Lk. 6:12-16; Acts 1:13-14). We are going to look at each of them in a separate Bible study, so we shall just mention a few basic facts ... Each time the list of the disciples are mentioned, Peter's name is always first because he was such a dominant figure ... yet, the Lord chose him knowing that was how he was. On the other side, the last name in the lists of twelve, unsurprisingly, is always Judas Iscariot ... yet, the Lord chose him too, knowing what *he* was ... And the lay-out of the names also shows us the Holy Spirit had a purpose even in that!

Commentators reckon there were three groups of four within the disciple band. There was Peter's group consisting of himself, and his brother Andrew, and the other two brothers, James and John, - all from the same region in Galilee, and all fishermen. Group two consisted of Philip (the leader), Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas. The third group was made up of James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot. Overall, Peter was the most vocal of the disciples, and the one to whom the others looked when a question or an issue needed guidance.

Other basic observations we can make are that out of the twelve, Peter, James and John would have been closest to Jesus ... with Andrew on the edge of that group. Some of the others, we don't read too much about ... but we shall study them nonetheless, and actually discover quite a lot about them. ...

When we 'back off' and look at these characters from a very 'matter of fact' perspective, we are once more reminded how the Lord chooses ordinary people ... with their strengths and weaknesses, their short tempers, their vulnerabilities, and their limitations ... Yes, those were the type of people He sent out with the Gospel. ... Are we any different to them? Are we any better? ... No, surely we are not, and *there* is the encouragement for we are no different to those first disciples ... those weak vessels to whom Christ entrusted the Gospel. ... At the same time, though, He knows what He's doing when He chooses the people He does, and He puts it within them to be faithful. He doesn't save anyone for any other purpose than for serving Him ... There is no mention here of any of them saying, "I don't want to do that! I'm not going to do it!" ... They did it because of the claims Christ made upon to be His servants. What a privilege is that!

Nobody could have predicted such a motley group as this would have changed the world ... but they did, - we are testimony to it! It is their message we have accepted and we believe, [Eph. 2:20 we are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.](#)

The devil can come along and tell us there is nothing substantial we can do for God, so why bother trying? ... Who do you think you are ... a motley group?! Leave it to someone better! ... That is his trick, though. He wants you to do nothing for Christ, and so he convinces you you're of no benefit to the Kingdom of God. He 'takes the wind out of your sails', and in next-to-no-time the waves bash you against the rocks and you end up a spiritual shipwreck, - a name to live, but you're spiritually dead (cf. the church at Sardis, [Rev. 3:1](#)). That is what Satan wants for you ... But what Christ has for you is the honour of serving Him. That surpasses all the obstacles and problems you will face for you know as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, - like John, - that *it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is (I Jn. 3:2).* ... And is that not enough of a reward to work faithfully in the Kingdom? Will it not be most precious to hear Him say, [Mt. 25:21 Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord.](#)

Indeed, we stand under the shadow of the Great Commission, **Mk. 16:15** *Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature ...* That is where we are today, and that is our calling until Christ returns, or takes us unto Himself. He had no ‘backup plan’ when He called those twelve disciples ... ordinary, weak, failing, ignorant saints ... And neither has He any ‘back-up’ plan today as He looks upon you and me to carry on the work saints down through the ages have passed on to us. That is our mission as *ambassadors* for Christ. You might not feel you are up to the task, but *you are*, because the same Jesus Who saved you, called you, and promises to equip you ... and, remember ... “*Little is much when God is in it!* ... He will say, if we are faithful, Welcome home, My child - well done!” Amen.