

The Apostles of Jesus-Mark 3:7-20

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was originally intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, please get in touch with Pastor Derek at dberry@calvarybaptistsc.church.]

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 3:7-20...

For those who haven't been with us since January, we began the year by considering the gospel of Mark. We took a nine-week detour to study the doctrine of the church, which ended last week. I'm excited to say that we picked back up our study in the gospel of Mark this morning. By God's providence, this opening pericope summarizes the book of Mark thus far, and it looks forward to the next significant portion of this gospel writing. Therefore, our first point this morning is:

I. Looking Back and Pressing Forward (3:7-12)

If you turn your Bible over to the very first verse of this book, Mark states, *The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. This serves as a thesis for this entire book. Jesus is the Son of God, or God the Son, and the rest of the book lets us know what it means to hold this identity. We considered the fact that Jesus' authority is proof that he is indeed divine and not merely human. In verse 7 of our text this morning, we're reminded that Jesus has called disciples. And in calling his disciples, we see his display over humanity on full display. In verses 17 and 18 in chapter 1, we read, *And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him.* When God speaks, it's not a suggestion but a command. Think of the *Let there be* passage in Genesis. It would have been impossible for there not to be light when God commands it because he is sovereign over creation, which also extends to humans. More on this shortly. So, his authority over people is revisited.

We also find his popularity and fame due to his miracles amongst the people revisited. We see this in verses 7b and 8 of our passage. This should remind you of the first couple of chapters, where Jesus became a household name for his exorcising of demons, cleansing of lepers, healing of the sick, and even causing a paralytic to walk.

Although he wasn't popular with the religious leaders who sought to put a contract out on him, the people of Galilee couldn't get enough of him. Many, no doubt, followed him simply so they could have their need met, as is made clear in the gospel of John. In chapter two, the house in which he was preaching was so packed that the friends of the paralytic had to remove the roof of the house and let him down on a mat.

However, Jesus' ministry was not simply meant to be a healing crusade, as seen many times today. As a matter of fact, when Peter wanted Jesus to capitalize on the "successful" ministry in Capernaum, Jesus responded by making clear that he had come out to preach. That was the priority, although his compassion for the people also led him to meet their needs.

And based on the areas that the crowd came from in verse eight, it's highly likely that both Gentiles and Jews alike pressed in on Jesus, which is looking forward to Jesus creating a new people that consists of Jews and Gentiles alike. More on this point later.

Next, we find Jesus' authority over sickness and unclean spirits revisited. Let's reread verses 9-11. In verses 21-28 in chapter 1, we see the Lord Jesus casting out an unclean spirit, and the people in the synagogue are amazed! They say, *A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.* Only God himself has such power over the demons. And then, in the next section, we find a passage almost identical to what we've read this morning. Verse 34 of the chapter states, *And he healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons. And he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him.* So consistently, Jesus is authoritatively casting out demons and healing those with illnesses.

And then, in verse 12 of chapter 3, we find the full messianic identity concealed. Jesus is in the process of deconstructing Israel's understanding of the Messiah. They're under the impression that the King is coming, like David, to destroy the evil Roman empire. Therefore, without the right timing, the people would seek to make him King apart from his cross that he was called to bear. Consequently, he didn't allow the demons, of all people, to get ahead of his timeline in revealing himself to Israel.

A brief way to summarize the sections of Mark that we've covered thus far and to anticipate what's next is simply this: Jesus is unlike any who has come before or who will come after him. In other words, Jesus is the man! And we as human beings should bow in the presence of the God-King. Maybe you came here this morning thinking too highly of yourself. Perhaps it's your gift of gab, your external radiance, the insane amount of commas in your bank account, or your athletic ability that has you feeling like Elliot Ness, Mr. Untouchable. Well, I'm here to tell you that until you can cause humanity to do as you please and bend at your will simply at the sound of your voice, perhaps

you should sit down. Until you have a mixed multitude of individuals from all over the world from every tribe and tongue looking to you as their savior, you're not quite there yet. Until you place your full authority over sickness and unclean spirits on display for all to see, you should humble yourself and recognize that you're not him. And you may claim, well, of course not, Pastor, I know I'm not Jesus. However, if you're the sole dictator, ruler, and decision-maker of your life, then you practically say you're him! Maybe you're here as a nonbeliever, and you can recognize that when you make decisions without consulting the author of life, you always make a mess of things. Amen! God is gracious enough to make clear to you your need for him. If you're here saying everything is always fine apart from consulting Jesus in His Word, pray that the Lord would intervene and show you the devastation of sin.

And, of course, the most straightforward way anyone denies the uniqueness of Jesus is by forsaking his gospel. My love for movies was passed down to me by my father. He used to have me watching black and white films with Humphrey Bogart and Sidney Portier. I don't remember the name of the movie, but there was a film where James Cagney played a gangster role, as he always did. The police caught him, and a pastor tried to convince Cagney to beg for his life on his way to the electric chair so that the young kids who looked up to him would no longer view him as a deity. Although he initially refused, he reconsidered and bent to the preacher's request. Once the young men heard of it, they no longer thought he was the man.

How can someone who we thought was so iconic become so weak? But they didn't realize that it was Cagney choosing to look weak and lay down his life, which in all reality is true strength. The Israelites missed that Jesus was the Christ because of the manner in which he came. He was a poor carpenter servant who knelt and washed the disciples' feet. He was placed on an unfair trial and strung up on a cross like a piece of meat; surely this can't be our King! Be not deceived; he proved he was King and God through his authoritative power and command. He chose to humble himself to the point of Death on the cross for the love of his Father and his people. Don't confuse Jesus' humility for weakness. He's the only man who can reconcile you with God the Father. And don't think that he won't one day judge you! Because he came as a lamb staining, but he's returning as a conquering lion. There's none like him, therefore, repent and place your trust in him! Jesus is the man.

We move past our recap of Mark thus far and dive into the second major movement of this gospel work and our second major point this morning.

II. The Twelve Apostles of Christ (3:13-20)

We'll consider this section in three subpoints.

1. Christ's Sovereign Appointment on the Mountain (vv. 13-14a)

The fact that Jesus went up on a mountain has theological significance. Mountains in the Old Testament were a place of divine revelation in the life of Israel. And they also functioned similarly in the gospels. It was on a mountaintop where Jesus experienced the climax of his temptations by Satan, on a mountain where he preached the great Sermon on the Mount, he was transfigured on a mountain, the Olivet Discourse took place on a mountain, and of course, the giving of the Great Commission was on a mountain. So, our antennas should be up as we see he's gone up on a mountain. Something significant is about to take place.

Notice the wording that Mark employs in these verses. We're reminded of God's sovereignty over humanity. This wasn't a request but an effectual calling and command for these men to become Apostles. And this is how Paul understood his calling as an Apostle.

¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone... -Galatians 1:15

And Jesus found it necessary enough to remind these Apostles of this fact. So clearly, this wasn't just a throwaway doctrine.

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. -John 15:16

Let's consider two takeaways from this. Firstly, God sovereignly and providentially calls his people unto himself. Not only does this apply to Apostles, but to anyone who belongs to Jesus. We, in our own strength, cannot choose God, as we are dead in sin. Therefore, he draws his people unto himself. This is what Paul communicates to the church at Thessalonica,

⁴ For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. -1 Thessalonians 1:4-5

So, if you're here and believe in Christ Jesus, it's because the Father first chose you, which should lead you to respond in worship! Second takeaway: this, too, highlights the divinity of Jesus. Some deny that Jesus is God because of a lack of verses where this is

explicitly stated. But that only reveals their ignorance regarding the attestation of the gospels. Mark equates Jesus with God by the title “The Son of God” at the beginning of the gospel, something the Pharisees would have understood in their day.

¹⁸ This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. -John 5:18

And then Mark demonstrates how the authority of Jesus attests to the fact that he is God! He brings authoritative teaching, mastery of the Sabbath, and can forgive sin. And now we see him fulfilling a role unique to God in the Old Testament, calling a people unto himself for a specific service and even renaming Peter, James, and John. Yahweh in the Old Testament would rename the servants he called to himself, think Abram, for example. And now Jesus is doing this very thing. The first-century readers would understand that this must be God incarnate. This is why Biblical Theology is so essential. It helps us to see how the entire picture fits together and is, therefore, a key to unlocking a full-orbed interpretation of the Scriptures.

Speaking of Biblical Theology, there is great significance in the Lord Jesus choosing twelve apostles. It appears that the number of the disciples is more important than their names. Remember, there were twelve tribes of Israel. Due to Israel's disobedience, he scattered the nation so much that by this point, only the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and the half-tribe of Levite remained. The wiping out of Israel was both prophesied and fulfilled in the Old Testament. However, many prophecies pointed to a future restoration of Israel. We heard one this morning that Krystal read for us. Here's another:

¹⁰ In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.¹¹ In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.¹² He will raise a signal for the nations and will assemble the banished of Israel, and gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. -Isaiah 11:10-12

We see this all the time in the Old Testament. Amid God announcing his judgment on Israel, he follows with a promised hope that the twelve tribes of Israel will one day be restored.

But how this prophecy was fulfilled was in an unexpected manner. While Israel was expecting to be restored politically and nationally, God planned to create a new people who would constitute Israel, and we see the forming of this new people by God

choosing twelve disciples, who will come to be known as the church. The kingdom of God has arrived through the coming of Jesus. Hopefully, everyone remembers the idea of the inaugurated kingdom “already, but not yet.” The arrival of this kingdom involved the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises to restore Israel; however, what becomes apparent after the ascension is that Jesus is creating a New Israel that’ll consist of converted Jews and Gentiles.

¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. -Ephesians 4:14-16

⁹ But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. -1 Peter 2:9-10

So again, the fact that Jesus chose twelve disciples indicates that he was beginning to form this new people. And the disciples themselves shared some understanding of this principle, which is why they replaced Judas Iscariot in the book of Acts, although their understanding was not yet fully developed on this matter. Here’s our second subpoint:

2. The Work of the Twelve (vv. 14b-20)

Mark gives two reasons as to why Jesus appointed these twelve. The first reason is so *that they might be with him*. And they did indeed spend three whole years with the Lord Jesus. They never left his side. Apparently, they were with him enough to witness his private prayers, which would have led them to ask him to teach them to pray. They witnessed his miracles and learned from his teachings. Imitation by association is God’s design. I knew Krystal and I were serious when we were spending so much time around each other that she began to talk like me. The phrases and slang I typically used became second nature for her. And that’s just because we spent so much time together. I’m sure you’ve seen this principle at play in your own life, for better or worse.

And because of the ministry Jesus planned to pass on to these men, they had to remain close to him for three years. Mark also states *that he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons*. This makes sense, considering the term apostle means messenger or one who’s sent. And Jesus did indeed send these men out to preach and cast out demons during his ministry, but it didn’t stop there. The preaching

the apostles was commissioned with was authoritative preaching. In other words, the apostles were authorized to establish doctrine after Jesus' departure. Jesus didn't reveal everything during his earthly ministry. He actually informs his disciples of this fact.

¹² "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. -John 16:12

But the Holy Spirit would continue to reveal truths to the apostles to establish doctrine within the local church, which wasn't yet birthed. Let's continue in the John 16 passage.

¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. -John 16:13

Jesus speaks specifically to the apostles regarding their distinctive ministry of establishing doctrine after his ascension. Therefore, the apostles were truly unparalleled. In other words, there are no more apostles today. They were here for a unique time in salvation history, where Jesus, by the Spirit, was establishing his church. And the apostles understood their particular mission, which is why they gave criteria for how they would replace Judas Iscariot as an Apostle.

²¹ So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, ²² beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection." -Acts 1:21-22

So you should run a million miles away from anyone with the title of an apostle in front of their name today. The weight of this truth is seen in Acts 2:42.

⁴² And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. -Acts 2:42

Here the apostles' teaching is placed on par with the Word of God! And I think that's what Luke wants his audience to understand because he could have easily said they devoted themselves to the Word of God. But no, he wants all to realize that the apostles are continuing the ministry of Jesus by establishing the doctrine that believers are mandated to live by. The church was built on the apostles and their teachings!

¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,^[a] but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone... -Ephesians 2:19-20

To rebel against their teaching is to rebel against God.

So let's consider two implications for today regarding the uniqueness of the Apostles' ministry. First, we must not pit Paul against Jesus. This is the classic move by liberal Christianity. Perhaps you're unfamiliar with this tactic by the enemy, but if you find yourself in Christian circles long enough, you'll hear these arguments. And believe me, they're no different from Satan tempting Eve with the words, "Did God really say?" Same tactic, new day, because old dogs don't learn new tricks. "Paul brought something new and fundamentally different from the teaching of love that Jesus embodied. It's Paul who forbids women to teach. It's Paul who supports slavery by commanding slaves to obey their masters. It's Paul who categorizes homosexuality as a sin. Jesus was silent on all these issues. We should follow Jesus and reject the misogynistic, bigoted, pro-slavery individual that is Paul." That's the argument. It's a blasphemous, heretical argument. And the proponents of said view misunderstand a great deal of Scripture.

Firstly, it would make sense that doctrine must be established after Jesus' ascension because the church wasn't officially created until Acts 2. Jesus had already gone to be with his Father. Therefore, in this new body of Jews and Gentiles, there had to be order established within the churches, which brings us back to the John 16 passages.

Secondly, Paul understood himself as an apostle establishing doctrine, and the right-hand man of Jesus, Peter, confirmed this.

³⁷ If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord. -1 Corinthians 14:37

¹⁵ And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, ¹⁶ as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. -2 Peter 3:15-16

Therefore, reject a form of red-letter Christianity that elevates the words in the gospels over and against those in the Pauline epistles. They're all equally the Word of God!

The second implication builds off something I stated earlier, that there are no more apostles today. Although there are no apostles today, we have Scripture and the local church. This is not a one-to-one comparison, but I would say that the Bible, coupled with the local church, functionally took the place of apostles in our day. The Scripture portion

is pretty straightforward. We receive our doctrine and instruction from the Word of God, and as we read in Acts 2, the New Testament epistles are synonymous with the “apostles’ teachings.”

But what about the local church? Perhaps you know where I’m going. The keys of the kingdom! Remember, in Matthew 16, Jesus gives the keys to the apostles and authorizes them to bind and loose. And we see examples of the apostles employing the keys in the New Testament. Here’s an example of both binding and loosing:

¹⁴ Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, ¹⁵ who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, ¹⁶ for he had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ¹⁷ Then they laid their hands on them and they received the Holy Spirit. -Acts 8:14-17

Verse 12 of this passage says that the people of Samaria believed the Word that was preached to them. So they were already believers; however, the apostles were called so that they could be bound as a local church. The apostles didn’t give the Samaritans salvation, but by their actions, they made the heavenly pronouncement that they were the right confessors with the correct gospel confession. And we also see the loosing function of the keys employed by Paul.

²⁰ among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.-1 Timothy 1:20

Paul could excommunicate these individuals by himself because he was an apostle. We no longer have apostles to employ the keys of the kingdom. However, we do have local churches. And in Matthew 18, Jesus gives the keys to the local church to make heavenly pronouncements on who possesses the correct *who* and *what* of the gospel.

¹⁷ If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed^[1] in heaven. ¹⁹ Again I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.” -Matthew 18:17-20

Again, this is why church membership is so crucial for those who name the name of Christ. And this is why we, as the local church, must study and know the gospel well and understand the doctrine of conversion to utilize the kingdom keys Biblically. You

cannot be an obedient Christian apart from church membership. It's impossible. And I pray that the weight of this truth settles in on you this morning.

Last subpoint under our second major point:

3. Concluding Applications.

Let's briefly consider three concluding applications from this text. First, consider the strange group Jesus chose to be his apostles. Four of them were fishermen, one a despised tax collector, another possibly a member of a radical and violent political party, and of six of them, we know practically nothing. None of them were scholars. They were all typical laymen that God used to establish his church.

¹³ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. -Acts 4:13

And this has always been God's design. He drafts the measly Spud Webb on his team instead of Jordan. And we can even see God's handy work in our hearts. We don't typically root for the unstoppable team. This is why many people hated the Patriots and the Kevin Durant Golden State Warriors. We love to see an upset. We get this from God! Paul himself told this to the church at Corinth.

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are... -1 Corinthians 1:26-28

Believer. God isn't looking for the individual with the most polished presentation or who can flaunt their theological prowess, but he's looking for the ordinary humble person. That was God's design with the apostles, and he's still saving and using ordinary people.

Here's our second concluding application: we see what it means to follow Jesus as we study the life of the apostles. Again, not everything will apply to us because the apostles were unique; however, they did leave a pattern of what it means to be with Jesus and to carry on his mission. It means we boldly declare the gospel to the lost around us. It means we continually count the cost of following Jesus. It means we die to our desires and inclinations. It means we expect rejection from the world. If you want to know what it means to be a disciple of his, study the lives of these men in the New Testament.

And lastly, know that just as Jesus was with his disciples for three years, he's always with us. This was the promise to the apostles and those who would believe after them.

And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." -Matthew 28:20b