

Mark 3:13-19 - The Good News of the Apostles - Part 1

I don't know about you guys but I find the world of the apostles fascinating. Who they are, what they did for the Lord. But I think it's helpful to start with the basics: What is an apostle? How many were there? What do they do? Are there still apostles today?

And to be honest this is going to feel more like a theology of apostleship than a sermon but I think it's especially important for us to have a clear understanding. Next week we'll dive into the specific apostles and talk more about them personally and specifically as it relates to Jesus. But this morning is a higher level overview.

Why is this important? Because there are many people who believe that apostles are still running around today. They believe that God still raises up apostles to lead his church. Why is that an issue?

Because I think we all intuitively know that an apostle has special authority, given by God to lead the church. Did you know that the Mormon church has 12 apostles? They lead the Mormon church alongside the the President.

In the charismatic and Pentecostal world there is what is called the New Apostolic Reformation, or NAR for short. This is not a fringe group. This is a massive group of people who believe that God still raises up apostles to lead the church. They also believe in deliverance ministry, personal revelations, that God continues to speak, so on.

People like: Todd White, Bill Johnson of Bethel Church, Rick Joyner, Peter Wagner, Kenneth Copeland, Lou Engle and others are all part of this movement. And the deal is that once you believe that apostles continue to exist to this day you have unleashed a crisis in authority. Because apostles have broad authority in the church. This is why Paul could go from church to church in the NT world and everyone listened to him. And why I can't just show up to Faith Bible or Grace Christian Fellowship or the Vine and expect to have authority. I'm an elder, not an apostle.

Also, if apostles are still alive today then that means God is still raising up authoritative leaders in his church and we are to submit to them. So this is an issue of authority, an issue of whether or not God still speaks, an issue of God's work in his church. And because this is so pervasive, I think it's worth pausing to look at apostles specifically.

So let's start here in our passage and then we'll expand outward. **Read 13-16a**

So we first see this word apostle in **Vs. 14**. Apostle is just a transliteration of the Greek word apostolos and it means someone who is sent out. Usually it's for a specific mission or task. Now, if you look up the word apostolos in the Greek NT you'll see it used 2 different ways. First is just a generic way of anyone: just someone sent out on a mission. Epaphroditus is called an apostolos in **Phil 2:25**, where it just means a messenger. He was sent on a mission to deliver a message to a church. There are a few other times where it's used in just a benign way.

The second way it's used is more specific. It refers to the office of apostle. There are 3 offices in the NT: apostles, elders, and do you know the third? Deacons. They are called offices because they are officially recognized publicly as serving the church in specific ways. It's not that there's a little room they meet in in an office building or something. It's that these are the 3 publicly recognized positions in the Bible.

These are the only public offices the church recognizes. So, for instance, there is no office of monk or nun or priest or pastor's wife or Pope or cardinal or trustee. A lot of Protestant churches have trustees but they shouldn't because it's not biblical.

Elders specifically serve the spiritual needs of the church and are publicly recognized. Deacons specifically serve the material needs of the church and they are also publicly recognized.

Apostles - the office - was a unique role within the early church to be an authoritative over churches. The apostles themselves were not infallible; they could sin and make mistakes. But nevertheless God raised them up to guide his church. And we'll see more about that in a bit.

Now in this passage I just want to point out how much authority Jesus is exerting over the lives of these men. Everything about these few verses show that Jesus is in sovereign control of who has authority over his church. And we see that in several ways.

First of all, he calls these men to himself. **Read 13**

We don't know what mountain this is, it could be just a random mountain. But it seems that the mass of followers that were following him in the previous section now come with Jesus up the mountain. But Jesus only calls the ones he wants to be apostles. There's no interview process. There's no application process. There's no jockeying for power in Jesus's Kingdom - at least not yet. Jesus calls those he wants. He exerts sovereign authority over their lives.

And notice why he calls them. **Read 14-15**

Again, it's really hard to miss the redundancy. He called. He appointed. He appointed. He chose. He desired. Why did he do this? He names them apostles. So just their very designation should give us some insight: Jesus has ordained them for a mission. He's ordained them to go be sent out. These are going to be missionaries with authority over every church that's planted.

Jesus sees the crowds. He seems the mass of humanity. They're so great and so overwhelming that they would inadvertently crush him just to get to him. They're so great he has to preach from a boat out in the water so that they can all hear him. Clearly the task of preaching the gospel requires helpers. This is why he calls them: to be sent out for the gospel.

They've got 3 priorities: to be with him. **Read 14**

These 12 will be Jesus's inner circle. They will know him intimately and personally. They will see how he responds and interacts and personally devotes himself to God. They will be able to ask the hard questions.

Many of the interchanges we see in the gospels has a public section where Jesus is talking to the masses and then a follow up private session where Jesus is only talking to the disciples. The parable of the 4 Soils is one example. The teaching on divorce and remarriage is another. He teaches publicly and the crowds are astonished and often confused. Then we read about how the disciples came to him - also confused - and Jesus clears it up for them.

But they are to be with him and know him. And it ends up being pretty obvious that they spent a lot of time with him. **Look at Acts 4** for a minute.

Remember this is when the apostles healed a beggar and they're preaching in the Temple. The authorities arrest Peter and John and begin questioning them. **Read 4:5-13**

Where did this boldness and conviction come from? It came from being with Jesus. The apostles weren't highly educated in the Jewish systems. They didn't get rabbinical training or preaching practice from the Pharisees. They were with Jesus.

Just a little side note of application here: We too are called to be with Jesus. Jesus says in **John 15:1-7**: abide in me...the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, neither can we bear any fruit unless we abide in Jesus.

What does that mean? It means we need to be with Jesus. We need to soak in his word, meditate on the truth of the Word, pray according to his will, walk according to the Spirit.

And maybe you're like "Yeah, but the apostles got to actually hang out with Jesus." Well, yeah, that would have been awesome. But Jesus himself says it's to our advantage that he goes away and sends the Holy Spirit - the Helper - to us. It's a better blessing that we have the Word of God in our heads and the Spirit of God in our hearts than the Son of God at our side. **John 16:7**

We have to be with Jesus just like the apostles were with Jesus if we ever hope to have any fruit in this world at all.

If you have no fruit in your life it's probably because you're not with Jesus very often. And if you're abiding with Jesus often, it's impossible not to have some kind of fruit.

Back in Mark 3 they were called to be with Jesus. To learn, to see, to grow. Second that he might send them out to preach. **Read 14**

The opening of the gospel of Mark says: The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It's the beginning of the good news. That's what gospel means: good **news** or good **message**. How do you get that message out to people? It needs to be told. It needs to be declared.

St. Francis of Assisi is responsible for one of the worst quotes of all time: "Preach the gospel at all times, if necessary use words."

That's like saying: Breathe air at all times, if necessary use lungs.

Eat food at all times, if necessary use mouth.

How else you going to do it?

Preach the gospel at all times, if necessary use words? The gospel is words. It is **news**, it has to be proclaimed. It has to be told. Now, to be fair, I think what he was getting at is that our life should exemplify the gospel we preach. We should live lives consistent with the gospel. I think we all agree with that.

But because the gospel contains information it's not discernible simply by being nice. It's not discernible simply by being polite. Or happy around people. Although we should be a delight to be around.

The fact that we're sinners under the just and good judgement of God who deserve hell but that God in his love sent his Son to be a substitute for us by dying on a cross, rising again, ascending to heaven and one day come to judge all men and glorify only those who have repented and trusted in him is **news**. People have to hear that, know that, and embrace that.

That's what these apostles were raised up to do: to go preach that good news. That the Kingdom of God had arrived in the person - the King - Jesus.

And they also cast out demons. **Read 15**

We've seen this before. This is one of the principle ministries of Jesus. He exerts divine power over the spiritual world. There are spiritual beings all around us of a wide variety of types. Most people and cultures recognize this spiritual activity. Our humanistic, naturalistic society kind of represses spiritual activity to the point of denying it altogether or dismissing it as a random and rare occurrence.

But we see in the ministry of Jesus he faces this all the time and overcomes it. But he then delegates that same authority specifically to the apostles. It's an authority that not everyone has. Not every believer has this authority. We all have the ability to pray for someone or preach the gospel to them. But do we have unilateral authority over demonic activity happening to them: no.

It turns out this ability to perform exorcism is one of the main qualifications to be an apostle. And I don't think exorcism itself was the primary goal of the apostles. I think it was a good thing and it delivered many people

from demonic oppression. I think this ability was primarily to authenticate the legitimacy of the person claiming to be an apostle.

How did you know this person spoke for God? How do you know they have authority over the church? Well, if they can demonstrate authority over the spiritual world - like Jesus demonstrated authority over the spiritual world - that's a good start.

And because of that, it seems this power would have been obvious to those who saw it. It would have been demonstrated in such a way that it was clearly miraculous.

Now, a couple other things I want us to notice here. First, how many apostles does Jesus appoint here? 12. Why 12? Why not 7 - the number of perfection. Or 10 or even 20? What's he doing?

Because it parallels the 12 tribes of Israel. Actually what Jesus is doing is creating a new people of God that is no longer based on the 12 tribes of Israel, but on his teaching and the teaching and authority of the 12 apostles.

I mean, even the imagery here is striking. Where are they at? They're on a mountain. And the masses are coming and he appoints specifically 12 people to represent himself to the people.

What's happening here? It's a recasting of Israel at the base of Mt. Sinai coming to God on the mountain. Remember in Exodus the people of Israel were rescued out of Egypt, they cross the Red Sea and come to the base of Mt Sinai. God is there and going to give them his Law, his covenant. And Moses and the elders from each tribe are there to administer the covenant.

This scene is a reforming of that. Actually, to be technical, that scene looked forward to this scene. That scene was the shadow, this is the reality.

The masses are all here, but instead of one elder from each of the 12 tribes it's the 12 apostles. And to be clear, Jesus is not an apostle. He's called an apostle in **Heb. 3:1** in a generic sense, but in this setting he's God on the mountain forming a new people who will follow his 12 apostles.

That's why in **Rev 21:9-14** we see John's vision of the New Jerusalem. And the city has 12 gates - the 12 gates are the 12 tribes of Israel. And it has 12 foundation stones. What are the foundation stones? The apostles.

This is not an accident. What the OT did for us was to give us a shadow picture of the 12 tribes to show us the way to the true reality: the Lord God, Jesus, and his 12 apostles who would preach the good news about him.

That's why Paul says in **Eph 2:19-20** that "we [gentiles] are no longer strangers and aliens but are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."

I know that might seem like a lot to digest and maybe just a little bit heavy theologically. But what Jesus is doing here is radical. He is showing that he is fundamentally transforming the entire way in which God is worshipped. It no longer matters if you're part of one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

What matters now is: are you following the teaching of the 12 apostles who all point to Jesus?

Now, something you might be asking yourself at this point is "How many apostles were there?" It seems clear that there ended up being more than 12.

Judas, though a false convert, was a true apostle. We have no evidence to suggest he couldn't cast out demons, or preach well, or that the other apostles doubted his apostleship. He was one of the twelve - that's what the gospel writers say over and over.

After Judas died the apostles appointed Matthias in **Acts 1**. That would be 13 apostles. Did they do the right thing? Because later God personally appoints Saul, later renamed by God to Paul, as apostle. That's 14 apostles.

In **Acts 14:14** it says that when the *apostles* Barnabas and Paul heard of it - heard that the people were going to worship them for doing a miracle - they stopped them. So Barnabas makes 15.

In **Gal. 1:19** Paul is talking about how he went to Jerusalem after his conversion to talk to the apostles and he says "but I saw none of the apostles except James the Lord's brother." Now in this list of 12 here there are 2 Jameses. James the son of Zebedee and James the son of Alphaeus. But neither one of them is Jesus's brother - or technically, half brother. At this point in his ministry Jesus's whole family rejected him. **Read 20-21**

During his earthly ministry it seems that his whole family rejected him. But later, after his resurrection, at least some of his family came to faith. Mary calls him "Lord" in the Garden after his resurrection. And James apparently comes to faith. Jude, the writer of the small book, is also probably Jesus's half brother and comes to faith as well.

So James is called an apostle - that's 16. And many believe that although he's not called an apostle directly, Jude is likely considered an apostle - that would be 17. How many are there? We don't know.

There are enough apostles where when Paul talks about apostles in **2 Cor. 12** he doesn't give a list, that would be easy if there was a set number. But he does give some qualifications: able to do signs and wonders and mighty works. And coupled with the qualification in **Acts 1**: they need to have seen the risen Jesus. And specifically sent out by Jesus.

Now, what does that mean for us when we think of the number 12? Is it a problem that there are more than 12? I don't think so. First of all, the initial 12 were simply to signal that Jesus is recreating the people of God.

Second, just because God appointed more then does not mean there are more now. No one has seen the risen Lord Jesus for 2 millennia. And no one has been able to do mighty works or miracles or cast out demons like the apostles. So I don't think there's any way someone could legitimately say there are apostles walking around today.

Also, something we see in the book of Acts is that the power and decision making of the apostles eventually transfers over to local church elders. When the councils are convened to figure out whether or not the Gentiles can be part of the people of God, it's the apostles and elders that make the determinations.

Okay, we're going to survey the NT about the apostles here in just a second. But let me make one more observation to launch into the rest of the NT.

Notice that Jesus renames quite a few of the apostles. **Read 16-17**

What do we make of that? Well, in ancient times many people had multiple names; two or even three names. It was common to do that. But here, it's Jesus himself who renames them.

Let's do a little thought experiment. Imagine you had some friends who started going to a new and upcoming church. The teaching was a little strange. Most of the faithful pastors you knew were opposed to this new church. But there was a lot of buzz. And you're friends get some coffee with you the next week and say, "Hey, look, don't call me Jim anymore. My name is Nathan. And his name isn't Craig, it's Andrew." "When did you guys change your name?" "Oh, our pastor changed our name."

What? What kind of church would you imagine they were involved in? A cult. Because only a cult leader has that kind of power over people. We've already seen Jesus call them, appoint them, send them, have them be with him. Now he's naming them. That's weird.

Well, it's only weird when people do that to other people. It's not weird when God does it. God renames all kinds of people. He renames Abraham, Sarah, Jacob, Paul and others. When you rename someone you are exerting a huge amount of control and authority over them.

And get this: the apostles gladly accepted it. **Turn** with me over to **Rom. 1**. Notice how they viewed their lofty title of apostleship. **Read 1-6**

Paul doesn't view his apostleship as something to lord over people. He views it as slavery. He is the lowest of the low. And his apostleship wasn't something he wanted, it was something ordained by God who called him into that position.

In fact, he says the same thing in almost every letter he writes. **Look at 1 Cor. 1. Read 1**

This isn't him throwing down the trump card. He's saying that the authority he has has been given to him. And this authority comes not with a high and lofty position, but one of suffering and service. **Look at 4:9-13. Read**

When people start claiming today that God has called them to be an apostle usually there's an air of superiority. An air of how exalted they are. That's not how Paul saw it. He saw it as the least of all service. He saw it as a sentence of death.

Almost all the apostles were killed for their faith in some of the most inhumane ways. But they served the Lord faithfully. There was no inner "good ol boys club." **Look at Gal. 1. Read 1-2**

Paul didn't appoint himself and the group of apostles didn't appoint him either. Jesus appointed him.

Look at James 1. Church history almost universally says this is Jesus's brother. But notice he doesn't name drop here in any way. **Read 1**

James could have said he's an apostle. He could have mentioned, by the way I grew up with Jesus. No, he's a servant - doulos, a slave - just like the rest of us.

He's a slave of God the Father and he's a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ. James identifies more as a slave of Jesus than he is the brother of Jesus.

Peter does almost the same. **Look at 1 Pet. 1. Read 1a**

Peter says he's an apostle here. But notice who he identifies with later in **chapter 5. Read 1-5**

Peter's down there with the elders. He's a fellow elder who partakes in suffering just like everyone else. He doesn't domineer, he's not in it for the money, but as a humble example like Jesus.

One more, look at **Jude 1**. I mentioned before we're not 100% sure if Jude is an apostle. There are 4-5 books in the NT that were not written by apostles. Mark, Luke/Acts, Jude and possibly Hebrews. So the NT writers didn't have to be apostles, though maybe those guys were. But notice how Jude identifies himself. **Read 1**

He's also a slave. And he also could have said "by the way, I'm the brother of Jesus." But he doesn't. He says he's the brother of James.

Jude like the rest of the apostles know that they are fallible like the rest of the people of God. They're not perfect. The writings that we now have as Scripture are perfect because the Spirit moved them to write them down. But the men themselves were fallible. And sinful and weak. And God used them in their suffering for his glory.

And he used them to bless us. There is a sense in which the apostles are slaves of Jesus just like we are. They are on the same level. But we also need to praise God for using these men in a special way to build his church, preserve his word, and establish his church for his glory. **Pray**