

JESUS CALLS THE TWELVE

Mark 3:1-19

Key Verses: 3:13-14

“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach...”

One of the great themes of Mark’s gospel is Jesus’ disciple-raising ministry. It was essential for Jesus’ gospel ministry. If Jesus had not raised his disciples, his ministry would have subsided after his death and gradually disappeared. It is remarkable to realize that Jesus left behind no written works; there is no book written by Jesus. Jesus’ teaching was inscribed in the hearts of his disciples. In this way his message has reached succeeding generations and the whole world. Just before his ascension into heaven, after raising disciples for three-and-a-half years, Jesus said to them, **“go and make disciples of all nations”** (Mt 28:19). This is the command of Jesus, who has all authority in heaven and on earth. We Christians must obey this command. We cannot change or ignore it. God’s work has continued until the present day through those who obey this command absolutely. The question is, how can we raise disciples of Jesus in our times? The style of education has changed since Jesus’ time. Now we are living in a post-Christian era. Yet the principle of raising disciples has not changed. What is it? Let’s learn from Jesus through the study of this passage.

First, Jesus’ immediate reason to call the twelve (1-12). In verses 1-6, Jesus helped one needy person at the risk of his life. Then so many needy people began to come to him from everywhere, as we see in verses 7-12. This tells us the immediate reason for Jesus’ calling the twelve. One Sabbath day Jesus went into a synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there (1). According to Luke 6:6, it was his right hand that was shriveled. He came to the synagogue to receive God’s word and worship on the Sabbath day. He must have sat down in one corner of the synagogue, hiding his shriveled hand in his pocket, trying to avoid notice. When God created human beings, he gave us two hands in order to work effectively. But this man’s right hand was useless. Usually we greet others by shaking hands, using our right hands. But he had to extend his left hand in an awkward manner. As a boy, he could not play many team sports and was despised and ostracized. This crippled hand problem became an element of fatalism to him. Because of this, he was

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crippled mentally and socially; his whole being was crippled. It also must have affected his view of God, causing him to wonder, “Why did God allow me to become like this?” Not only this man, but everyone has a serious life problem. Though people look okay on the outside, so many are shriveled in some way. Some children grow into adulthood without ever hearing words of affirmation from their parents. Some come from dysfunctional families, and some have trouble making normal relationships with others. Some people have speech impediments, others have hearing problems. As soon as Jesus saw this man, he wanted to help him, out of his great mercy. On the other hand, the Pharisees did not care about this man at all. Rather, they wanted to use him in order to accuse Jesus of healing on the Sabbath (2).

The atmosphere was tense. It did not seem to be the proper time to heal this man. It seemed foolish to collide with the Pharisees. But Jesus did so intentionally. Jesus said to the man, “**Stand up in front of everyone**” (3). Then Jesus asked, “**Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?**” (4) The answer is obvious: To do good or to save life is lawful on the Sabbath. But the Pharisees had lost the spirit of the Sabbath, which is God’s heart to do good and to save life. They lost discernment of good and evil, and the sense of dignity of life. Jesus had a great shepherd’s heart for them. To awaken their conscience he challenged them with a question. But they remained silent. They covered the ears of their hearts in order not to be persuaded by Jesus. They were supposed to love the word of God and the truth and to know the heart of God. They also were supposed to be shepherds for the needy. But their motives were evil and their hearts were hardened. Jesus looked around at them in anger, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts (5a). Their evil attitude provoked God’s wrath (Ro 2:5).

Jesus is the righteous God. At the same time, Jesus is full of compassion. Out of his great compassion, he said to the man, “**Stretch out your hand**” (5b). It was not easy for this man to stretch out his hand. It was the shameful deformity that he had always tried to hide from others. He had to overcome self-consciousness, doubt and fear of the Pharisees, who could cast him out of the synagogue for life. But he trusted Jesus. He stretched out his hand—his hand of faith, his hand of obedience. When he did this, God’s life was infused into his hand; his hand became vibrant and was completely restored (5b). Not only was his hand healed, but his whole person was healed

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from the debilitating effects of the handicap. His right hand was so strong that he could knock out a Pharisee with one punch. Jesus' words have power to restore us from lifelong handicaps. In order to be cured and restored, all we need is faith to stretch out our hands toward Jesus. We need to stretch out our hands—hands of prayer, hands of faith, hands of obedience. On seeing this miracle, the Pharisees should have repented. Instead, they went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus (6). During ordinary times, the Pharisees despised the Herodians. But hatred drove them to collaborate.

After confronting the Pharisees, Jesus needed some time to cool down. So he withdrew with his disciples to the lake. Surprisingly, a large crowd from Galilee followed (7). They came to Jesus from Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon (8), Gentile territory. This crowd was multinational. Because of the crowd, Jesus needed a small boat to keep people from crowding him (9). Most of the people who came were suffering from diseases and evil spirits (10). Whenever the evil spirits saw Jesus, they cried out, **“You are the Son of God.”** Jesus gave them strict orders not to tell others about him (11). These were desperate people. They needed healing. They needed freedom from demons. But most of all, they needed Jesus' love and God's word.

Why did they come to Jesus? Verse 8a says, **“When they heard about all that he was doing, many people came to him....”** They heard that Jesus had reached out his healing hand and touched a man with leprosy, saying, **“I am willing. Be clean!”** (1:41) They heard that Jesus received a paralytic who was brought to him by faith, saying, **“Son, your sins are forgiven...I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home”** (2:5,11). Also, they heard that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners, saying, **“It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners”** (2:15,17). When they heard the good news, they were greatly moved by Jesus' love and mercy. They believed that Jesus would heal them physically, mentally and spiritually. That is why they came to Jesus, leaving everything behind. People need Jesus, the good shepherd. People seem to seek good businessmen, skillful politicians or powerful leaders. But what they really want is a good shepherd who will care for them with all their hearts, even giving their lives. When people find a shepherd like this, they follow

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wholeheartedly. Jesus is our Good Shepherd, who laid down his life for us (Jn 10:11). Jesus is the Savior of the world (Jn 4:42).

Second, Jesus appointed twelve (13-19). The times in which Jesus worked were dark, so dark. There seemed to be no solution, and no way out. What could one do in such times? Some people are willing to try to make things better, but when they realize how deep the darkness is, they give up. At such a moment, Jesus went up on a mountainside (13a). According to Luke, he spent the night praying to God (Lk 6:12). Jesus struggled to listen to what God really wanted him to do. There were many issues that seemed to be urgent: delivering Israel from Roman oppression, feeding the hungry, freeing John the Baptist from prison, setting people free from Jewish legalism, and reviving the economy. Jesus was well aware of these issues. But he sought to know what God really wanted him to do. He wanted to see the big picture of God's salvation work, beyond all of the troubling and pressing problems of the moment. This is why Jesus spent the night praying to God.

After prayer, what did Jesus do? Verses 13b-14a say, **“...he called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve...”** Jesus had already called disciples from the outset of his ministry. But at this moment, he formed the band of twelve. Twelve was symbolic of the number of tribes of Israel. As God had vision to raise the twelve tribes as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, so Jesus had a vision to raise twelve disciples as a royal priesthood for world salvation. We also need this kind of vision. Let's have a vision through the ministry of raising disciples. Jesus called to him **“those he wanted.”** If we want to enter a university or get a job, we must submit many qualifying documents and prove that we meet standards. But the school of Jesus is different. Jesus does not ask to look at a résumé first. He just calls to himself those he wants. His calling is only by his grace. When we look at the people Jesus chose, one by one, they were not special in terms of academics, social or economic status, or family background. They were very ordinary people and would have been nameless. Among them, there was even a tax collector, who was despised as a public sinner. We cannot discover through human analysis why Jesus chose them. But we find a clue in 1 Corinthians 1:28-29: **“God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.”** These days also, Jesus calls each of us to be his disciples. This calling is most important for us. We are

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not qualified. But we are chosen according to his sovereign will, and based on his grace alone. So we should treasure this calling and keep it. When Jesus called, “...**they came to him.**” They were willing to commit themselves to Jesus. Commitment was crucial to be a disciple of Jesus. It is a life commitment. Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.” Stephen Lutz wrote, “Where discipleship is involved, there is no room for a simple decision of faith divorced from genuine commitment and the rigors of following Jesus.”¹ Commitment to Jesus was the handle by which Jesus could take hold of them. In this way they entered the school of Jesus and grew to be great spiritual leaders.

What was the principle of Jesus in raising disciples? It is this: **“that they might be with him.”** Jesus did not just transfer skills to the disciples through programs. He shared life together with them, which was typical for masters and disciples in Jesus’ day. John the Baptist raised disciples and so did the Pharisees (2:18). Many influential teachers and philosophers had raised disciples. Disciples learned everything from their teacher. They followed their teachers everywhere, learned lessons by imitation, and even copied their teacher’s eating style. Disciples learned to be just like their teachers. After a disciple was fully trained, he could become a teacher and raise disciples of his own. Disciples could endure all kinds of hardships, hoping that one day they would become the teachers with their own disciples. Jesus’ disciples were trained in a way similar to others. But there was something very different. Jesus’ disciples were not to raise up their own disciples, but to raise up disciples of Jesus. In Christian discipleship, there is only one master, Jesus (Mt 23:8-10). Jesus wants a direct and personal relationship with each of his disciples. Through this their sinsickness can be healed and they can be transformed to be like Jesus. Most of all, by being with him, they can know Jesus, confess that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, have life in him, and preach the gospel to the whole world. What does it mean to “be with him” today? Jesus is not with us in the flesh today, as he was with his disciples. But Jesus is with us through the Holy Spirit. Jesus is present in his body, the church, of which he is the head. We can have fellowship with Jesus by meditating on his words, through prayer, and by meeting together in his name with other believers. In this way, we can learn

¹ Lutz, Stephen, 2011. “College Ministry in a Post-Christian Culture,” www.thehousestudio.com, pp 104-105.

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of Jesus and be transformed to be like him. In a word, this is living a Christ-centered life. It is to put Christ first in every area of our lives.

We can find two aspects of Jesus' purpose in raising disciples. The first is: **“that he might send them out to preach.”** Jesus spent a lot of time preaching. He showed an example to his disciples, but did not demand them to go and preach, except for one time when he sent them out to practice what they learned (6:7). This preparation shaped them for serving his world mission purpose in the future. After his resurrection, Jesus said in Mark 16:15: **“Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation.”** The book of Acts shows how Jesus' apostles preached the gospel boldly, wherever they went. As the gospel was preached, there was a great work of God. When early Christians devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, the church grew in number daily (Ac 2:42,47). Then a challenging problem regarding food distribution to widows arose. The apostles said, **“We will turn this responsibility over to others and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word”** (Ac 6:4). So the words of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly (Ac 6:7). The gospel continued to spread from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Ac 1:8). Jesus was not nearsighted in his purpose. Jesus had a long-range plan that took many years to fulfill.

The second aspect of Jesus' purpose was to give them authority to drive out demons. This does not mean that they all became junior exorcists. It means that Jesus equipped them to fight a spiritual battle against the devil. Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of this dark world and the spiritual forces of evil (Eph 6:12). Apostle Paul said, **“For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ”** (2 Cor 10:3-5). In order to fight the spiritual battle we need spiritual authority from above. This comes from totally surrendering ourselves to God. In essence, this is the fruit of prayer. Jesus wanted his disciples to grow as spiritual leaders who could discern the devil's work and demolish it by faith to set people free.

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In verses 16-19 we find the names of the twelve. Simon is mentioned first and Jesus gave him the name Peter, which means rock. Jesus had hope for him to become a rocklike spiritual leader. Jesus gave James and John the name “Boanerges,” which means “sons of thunder.” We don’t know exactly why Jesus gave them this name. Maybe Jesus had hope for them to be powerful gospel preachers like the thunder. These three disciples became the key leaders among the twelve. Andrew seems to have been vague, but he always had a point. Philip was calculative, which produced negativity. Bartholomew seems to have been naïve. Matthew was an able and selfish man. Thomas had a Ph.D. in doubt. We don’t know much about James son of Alphaeus or Thaddaeus. Simon the Zealot was a patriot. Judas Iscariot was double-minded. When we see these men, they had obvious weaknesses. They were nobodies, destined to live an ordinary life. But Jesus did not focus on their present condition. Jesus saw what they would become through his love and training. Jesus appointed the twelve—designating them apostles. Jesus saw great potential in each of them to become apostles. With this hope, Jesus bore all of their weaknesses and raised them step by step. Like the disciples, we have obvious weaknesses and seem to be nobodies. But Jesus has hope for each of us to become somebody. If we see ourselves without Jesus’ hope we can despair, torture ourselves, and become useless. So we need to see ourselves with Jesus’ hope. We also need to see our children and Bible students with Jesus’ hope. Then we can bear all their weaknesses and raise them as disciples of Jesus. Thank God who called us to be Jesus’ disciples in this generation. May God raise many disciples of Jesus in our times.