

The Extraordinary Ordinary

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- [0:00] If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to Mark chapter 3.! Elegant speakers. You get the best. Well, not necessarily. Because the greatest movement, and calling it a movement, is almost sacrilegious because it's so much more. But the communicating and the managing of the greatest opportunities that have been offered to humankind, or ever will be, was actually led by a pile of misfits. That seems so ragtag and obscure that the plan should have been ruined from the start. From a human perspective. But it did not fail at all. It still continues today and will until the world ends with success. And I'm talking about the opportunity of salvation through Christ.
- [1:22] The sharing of that message. The leading of those who have committed to it. The ministry that comes forth from it. Today, when we look at Mark, we look at the choosing of the apostles. It is amazing to see who Christ chose. And I believe it gives us all hope for our own lives, how we see this happen. It's in Mark chapter 3, beginning in verse 13. And it speaks of Christ when it says, And he went up on the mountain and called to them those whom he desired and they came to him. And he appointed twelve whom he also named apostles. That means the sent out ones. So that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. He appointed the twelve. And he appointed the twelve. Simon to whom he gave the name Peter. James the son of Zebedee. And John the brother of James.
- [2:30] To whom he gave the name Bonaerges. That is sons of thunder. Andrew and Philip. And Bartholomew. And Matthew. And Thomas. And James the son of Alphaeus. And Thaddeus. And Simon the zealot. And Judas. Iscariot. Who betrayed him. When you look at this list, you won't find a load of scholars. They were not great speakers, especially when he met them. They were not theologians. There are no rabbis among this group. There are no scribes among this group. There are no Pharisees among this group. There are no Sadducees among this group. There's not a priest among them. Or any from a religious establishment. Or at least in leadership at a religious establishment. They were too prone to mistakes. They were too prone to misstatements.
- [3:32] They were too prone to wrong attitudes. And they were too prone to faith failures. And he picked 12 of them. That's an interesting number. Because that is the same number as the Jewish tribes. Which are God's people in the Old Testament. Collected those people and put them into 12 tribes.

And those 12 tribes were to carry out the whole law system. The sacrificial system. As a prophecy of when the Messiah would come.

It was all a lead up to the Messiah. But when the Messiah came, they didn't recognize him. Now he picks 12 apostles.

The same number. None of which is of the Judaistic institution as far as in leadership. It is a judgment. By picking these 12 versus the 12 tribes of Israel.

[4:37] It is a judgment upon the leaders of that day. But it is a repositioning and a realigning of sorts. But it is much more than that as well.

It is an intense training system. Of raising up future leaders that will carry out the cause of Christ throughout the world. And establish the church to thrive until the return of the Lord.

And the reality is, it is estimated that he only had 18 months to do it. The reality is, as we have looked at Mark chapter 1 and Mark chapter 2 and part of Mark chapter 3.

Although I warned you when we began that Mark moves quickly. He is very brief. But those three chapters and all that great movement of people following Christ.

People's lives changing. People being healed. All of that makes up about half of the ministry of Christ already. Now he has about 18 months before he will go to the cross.

[5:38] These men were too often self-centered. They were too often self-promoting. And yet lacking a faith and lacking spiritual understanding.

And yet they would be immersed into the most intense hands-on seminary experience that has ever been known. And for the most part, they would come out sold on their cause and effective in carrying out its faith.

Our lives are changed because of the faithfulness of these men. God loves to choose the weak.

God loves to choose the foolish. He loves to pick the incomplete to do strong, wise, and wonderful work.

And these guys, I believe, give us all hope of being used by God. But they also challenge us as we see their commitment to him. Understand that from a human perspective, the future of the church and the long-term success of the gospel depended solely on the faithfulness of these men.

[6:59] There is no plan B. When Christ is crucified, raises again, is on the earth for a short time before he ascends, it all lives and falls with them.

It is a huge responsibility to men that, quite honestly, do not seem capable of carrying it out. And that's what makes the whole story somewhat amazing.

Now, again, Mark writes in a hurry with little detail, but Luke is much more thorough in what he says about everything. I want you to notice how he describes the process of choosing these men.

He says, in Luke chapter 6, verse 12 through 13, In these days Christ went up to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.

And when day came, he called his disciples and chose for them twelve, whom he named apostles. The Lord toiled all night.

[8:11] That word there for continued in prayer is a laboring, an intense laboring. And when the sun came up, he called those men to himself and he chose them.

What were they to do? Well, notice in the text it tells us what they were to do. They had three tasks. One was they were to shadow him.

It says in the text, so that they might be with him. That's what that's talking about. Over 150 years ago, A.B. Bruce wrote a book called Training of the Twelve. I read it about 25 years ago, did a study through it, and it opened my eyes to see much more and why Christ did what he did when he did it.

And how he many times implemented teaching behind the scenes and even on the spot to his disciples, almost in everything that he does from this point on until the cross.

Jesus came primarily to be the redemptive hope of all of humanity, to die on the cross for our salvation. However, he also came to train these 12 to spread the gospel, to plant the church of Jesus Christ, to influence the world with the cause until the return of the Lord.

[9:29] And the best way for them to learn was not to experience it with other spiritual leaders. It was not in the synagogue. The best way for them to learn, the spiritual leaders actually were hunting Jesus down, trying to kill him.

While he's choosing the apostles, they're coming up with a way to snuff him out. It was also not for them to sit under the greatest professors. Instead, it was to walk with the Lord.

As verse 14 says it, that they might be with him. By the way, the best way to learn about him is to be with him. As I thought about that, I couldn't help but think about the song that says, and he walks with me and he talks with me.

And he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known. Friend, that relationship is how Christ personalizes, through the power of the Holy Spirit, what he writes in his word.

They were to shadow him. The second thing, where they were to share the story. He would teach them how to share. And then he would send them out to share what they knew, as many as God would enable them to share with.

[10:49] As I said, the apostles mean the set out ones. They are unique. These, and later Paul, are the only apostles.

I'll be clear about this. If you go to a church and the preacher wants to be called apostle, you went to the wrong church, okay? Leave. As well, if he wants to be called father.

Matthew 23, 9 says that's not right either. So that's another sermon. But anyway, the apostles were set apart by Christ himself. Ephesians chapter 2, verse 20 says, The church is, quote, built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets.

Heaven is described. Revelation 2, 21, verse 14 says, And the wall of the city had 12 foundations, and on them were the 12 names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb.

Another scene in heaven shows 24 elders. 12 of those elders represent the apostles. 12 of those elders represent the 12 tribes of Israel. In other words, in heaven, redemption is complete.

[11:59] All God's people are together. Those before Christ that came because of Christ, and those after Christ are all in Christ.

And my point is that these apostles are unique men. They're set apart by God, and they were called primarily to share his story. The third reason, it says, is they were to silence the demons.

It says that he would give them authority to cast out demons. Now, I dealt with silencing the demons last week, and so I'll only touch on it this morning. Christ came to defeat evil once and for all, and he did that on Calvary.

It's done, folks. There are still battles being fought here and there in all of our lives, but I want you to make no mistake. The war is won. Now, the spiritual struggle, the demonic struggle, is much more graphic in other parts of the world than it is in the United States today, although I would confer that it is intensifying here as well, and I believe that's got a lot to do with the melting pot of the world coming to us with all their false religions and all those things.

It opens us up. Scripture shows that. However, the same evil is still prevalent, just not victorious. The greatest way to silence the evil of the world is to proclaim through word, deed, and love the much greater need, the story of Jesus.

[13:38] That's the key. One day, every knee shall bow, every tongue proclaim that Jesus Christ is Lord. In the meantime, it's our job to do that, and the apostles started that process, and so I want us to look at each of the apostles.

Now, don't panic. There's 12 of them. We're only going to look at four today. All of the synoptic gospels, that is Matthew, Mark, and Luke, they write in the same way.

John's a little different, but all of the synoptics have the apostles listed. John does not list them. Luke, who wrote the gospel of Luke, also wrote the book of Acts, and it's called the Acts of the Apostles.

He also wrote that book, and he makes the list again as well, but I believe that's the list that leaves off Judas, and we'll get to that later and explain why. But in all of these lists, you'll see the men grouped in groups of four.

The first four are always the first four. They're sometimes in different order, but they're always the first four. The second four are always the second four. The third four are always the last four, except that one that leaves out one.

[15:00] And always in the first group is Peter, Andrew, James, and John. They were the inner circle around Christ, and one of them particularly is always listed first.

I call him the outspoken. The first man that's always mentioned is Simon Peter. He's called Peter some places. He's called Simon other places.

His given name was Simon. Jesus called him Peter because Peter means rock. Some called him Simon Peter. Normally when Jesus referred to him as Simon, he was talking either about his background or the carnality in his life.

And when he called him Peter, he was talking about his spiritual side. It's kind of interesting to see that. But Jesus would make him a rock, but he was not a rock when they met by any means.

Peter was the fastest, most interruptive, loud mouth among them. He could not help himself. He said too much too often.

[16:02] Peter gives us loud mouths a lot of hope because he speaks more than any of them. He is rebuked more than any of them.

He is the only one that rebukes Christ among them. When Jesus spoke of the cross, Peter corrected him. When they came to arrest Jesus, Peter's the one that grabbed the sword from his own side and I believe tried to take the head off of a soldier.

But Peter was a fisherman, not a swordsman. So he took an ear off instead. When Jesus was being accused that night, it was Peter who denied him three times.

However, the spirit is a wonderful thing for the believer because when Jesus resurrected from the dead, it was Peter that he reaffirmed. And when the spirit came in Acts chapter two, it was Peter that became the voice of the Christian church.

It was Peter that proclaimed that powerful message. It was Peter that saw thousands of people come to know the Lord under his ministry in one day. He was martyred for his faith by crucifixion.

[17:14] It's not in scripture. History tells us this. And it was Peter who said that he was not worthy to die like Christ.

And instead, they hung him upside down on what's believed to be an X-shaped cross. If you read the book of Acts, especially in the first third of the book of Acts, you'll understand the significance of why Jesus picked Peter.

Then, after Peter, they have what I call the inviter. Andrew. Andrew. Andrew is Peter's brother and not anything like Peter. He is the first apostle to be called and is seen as the least of the top four.

There are places where the other top three go with Jesus that Andrew don't go. But, John the Baptist is the one that introduced Andrew to Jesus.

And the moment that Andrew was introduced to Jesus, he brought his brother Peter to Jesus. Andrew was, I call him the inviter because Andrew, every time we see him, is about bringing people to Jesus.

[18:29] It was Andrew who found the boy with his lunch and brought him to Jesus when the 5,000 were fed. It was Andrew that when Greeks, which speaks of Gentiles that were not believers, when Greeks were asking about Jesus, it was Andrew who brought those seekers to the Lord.

He never sought attention. He was quiet. He was unsung. But he was so very thoughtful of others.

And he was steady. He was steady in his ministry just in the background. We have no knowledge of him ever preaching.

I'm not saying he didn't. We have no knowledge of it. But he's the one that invited the preacher, Peter, to come to Jesus initially. And quite honestly, that's made all the difference.

History tells us that Andrew died on the cross as well for his faith. He spent his life bringing people to Jesus unapologetically.

[19:51] He's the inviter. The third one among them is the thunderous. The last two in this list of four are brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee.

It is apparent that Zebedee was a successful fisherman, had quite an enterprise, had hired servants working under him in that business.

His wife, the men's mother, traveled with the apostles and traveled with Jesus and underwrote a lot of the ministry because of the prominence of that family.

They may have even, James and John, may have even been cousins with Jesus. But there are a lot of Marys in Scripture and sometimes we parallel them together when they may not need to be paralleled.

So we're not positive about that. But Jesus nicknamed these brothers the sons of thunder. That sounds like a tag team rassler to me, a rassler to me, and that's what they did on the weekend I guess.

[21:04] But they came from money, they came from a household with hired servants and they wanted prominence. Their mother asked on their behalf if they could be in a place of prominence.

It appears that they set their mother up to ask on their behalf. But I call James the thunderous one because he was zealous, he was passionate, he was thunderous.

I want you to see what I mean by this. In Luke chapter 9, verse 51, there's an incident that I want you to see. It says, when the days drew near for him to be taken up. Now that's talking about when Jesus is going to go to heaven.

In other words, he's going to go to the cross, he's going to rise again, and then he's going to live on the earth for 40 days and then he's going to ascend. He's going to be taken up. He set his face to go to Jerusalem.

It's the last stage of his ministry. There was a preparation stage of sorts that was in the desert where he was tempted and he set his mind on what his ministry was to be.

[22:14] There was the beginning of that ministry along with that. Then there was the calling of the apostles. And then, at this point, he sets his face toward Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him who went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make preparations for him.

But the people did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem. Now I talked about last week, I talked about the Samaritans, talked about the history of it, the difficulty of that region.

People didn't like Samaritans. And apparently, they didn't like Jesus either. And it says, and when his disciples, James and John, saw it, they said, Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?

They weren't going to put up with it. But he turned and rebuked them. Man, what a statement that they made. What a statement. Think about what they said. Because in reality, who were they to be able to call down fire?

Now I'll tell you what that comes from. It comes from they knew the word. They had been in the synagogue, apparently. And they knew about Elijah. And Elijah was a hero to many.

[23:32] And Elijah could call down fire. And so man, they're followers of God. Why don't we just call down fire and burn up these Samaritans, is what they were saying. He turned and rebuked them and they went on to another village.

When you see that, can't you see the Sons of Thunder in wrestling attire? I mean, I can see that in my head, but anyway. But I grew up on Saturdays watching NAA wrestling. But these men didn't want to play games.

They were a little off. Do you want us to call down fire? Listen. Actually, Philip would later go to Samaria and would win possibly some of these same people to the Lord.

That's why God didn't call a fire upon them. A different kind of fire came upon them. The fire of the Holy Spirit of God. But these men were zealous. They were with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration.

They were the ones that went a little further in the garden with Jesus as they prayed. They, like Peter, had a fire in their belly. The passion of James was also for the gospel as well.

[24:46] James is the first to be martyred among them for the faith. Acts chapter 12, verse 2 talks about his death. And Herod had him killed with the sword.

That almost always means that he was beheaded for his thunderous stand for the gospel. He was the thunderous.

His brother, the last one we're going to look at this morning is the passionate. John was a lot like his brother. He was passionate. He was cut and dry about everything. He had no gray areas. And later he wrote about it.

This is the John that wrote the gospel of John. This is the John that wrote the three letters from John. I call it the big John and three little Johns. This is the John that wrote the book of Revelation on the Isle of Patmos.

This is the John that wrote more of the New Testament than anybody but the Apostle Paul. And he is a man of no compromise. Read what he wrote.

[25:54] It's light against darkness. It's life against death. It's kingdom of God against the evil empire. It's receive Christ or reject Christ.

It's bear fruit or be fruitless. It's be obedient to God or be disobedient to God. It's love God or hate God.

When you read John, especially his three letters, John's works will unsettle you or at least it should. You got to go read Paul too and he'll comfort you. But God took that call down fire among them and he mellowed that in John.

And he made John the Apostle of love. John became a tender hearted loving Apostle that lived, he's the only Apostle that lived into his old age.

in his writing he mentions truth 45 times. He was passionate about the truth. But listen to this.

[26 : 59] He mentioned witness 70 times. He wrote so that people would know Christ. He says in the Gospel of John at the end of it as well as in 1 John I write these things to you that you may believe that Jesus is life and you may have life in his name.

It's the reason he wrote them. But he mentions love more than either one of those. He mentions love 80 times. He calls those that he writes to little children.

He never mentions his own name in the Gospel. He always put the disciple whom Jesus loved. You know why he put that? Because he never got over Christ's love for him.

And we better not either. It is believed that after Paul started the church in Ephesus that John went and pastored that church until the Roman emperor Domitian put him on the island of Patmos in exile where he lived in a cave slept on a pillow of rock and saw a great vision from the Lord that led to him writing about it in Revelation.

In his latter days historians tell us that he had to be carried into church in his old age and that he was constantly saying my little children love one another.

[28 : 39] when it came time to carry out the greatest task that humankind will ever see Jesus chose the common Jesus chose the ordinary and he empowered them with the spirit of God and he made them extraordinary.

when I think about that I think about what in the world is holding us back from being all that God would have us to be.

What's holding me back? What's holding you back? What's being everything God would have you to be? God wants people who will speak boldly for him. God wants people who are quiet who don't say much but who are willing to walk up to others and quietly invite them to come to Jesus.

He even wants the thunderous those that you see coming those that will step up when needed. He wants the passionate.

The folks that love folks like the Lord Jesus. He wants you and he wants me. It's not our job to do the job of the apostles.

[30 : 14] It's our job to do the job that he set before us. And he has a way of taking our temperament and our strengths and our weaknesses and molding them and making them like clay on a potter's wheel and by the spirit of God and the power of the spirit of God to be effective to reach people and encourage people for the Lord Jesus Christ.

What is it God would have you to do? maybe you're here this morning and you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus. There's not a relationship there. You don't have a problem with him necessarily.

You just never have surrendered your life to him. Never have committed your life to him. I want you to know if you've never done that today's the day to do that. There's no need to put that off. If you'll ask him to forgive you of your sins and you'll acknowledge that you've done wrong in your life and ask him to come into your life and to change you, he will empower you with the spirit of God and he'll take those natural things within you and he'll tune them up by the spirit of God and use them in his might and power.

Maybe you're here this morning and you have done that privately but you've never acknowledged that through baptism. We plan to do that in a couple, three weeks and I encourage you if you've never been baptized to obey God in that.

By his commission and by his example, Christ told us, that was the first step that we're to take when we give our life to Christ. Or maybe God's drawing you to Pickens First Baptist Church.

[31 : 54] That's your step of obedience. That's what you're to do to obey God and if that be the case, we'd love to welcome you. We'd be happy to guide you in that or maybe it's something else.

I have no idea what it is. I don't ever pretend to know what God's speaking to you about but I'll tell you this, by the power of God, he'll make each one of us effective to do the ministry that he's called us to do.

And if you're a child of God, he's called you to do ministry in some form or fashion. whether it be quiet, whether it be loud, whether it be speaking, whether it be nudging, whatever it is, the apostles show us God can use any of us and will use any of us and he plans to use all of us.

So let's just be obedient and follow him today. Just say yes to whatever God would have for you. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, I love you. Thank you Lord for your love for us and I ask dear God that you'll help us to learn from the apostles, the great teachers that they are by their example, dear God.

Help us to be obedient to follow you as you lead us. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.