

Jesus and his apostles

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[0:00] I have the hinge point, that one. So I just want to, in a slightly more light-hearted way, get you into the idea of what, if you were one of Jesus' disciples and you'd been following him up to this point, thinking, wow, you know, this is all good.

But suddenly he says, right, I'm going to give you power and you're going to do this now, some of this. Just imagine for a moment that you've never driven a car but that you've sat in one and watched someone do it a lot and now it's your turn.

What probably happens? Maybe you're overconfident and you think, oh, this is great. You know, I know exactly. But surely you get into this car and you start trying to do what you think they were doing with their feet and you stall and you have all kinds of problems, yeah?

And it must have been a bit scary. Joe 90 wouldn't have worried. Now this could reveal my age. Who here has heard of Joe 90?

No. There's a few. Joe 90 wouldn't have been worried here. If you don't remember anything about this nonsense of my childhood, the father, Professor MacLean, was a very clever man.

[1:18] He invented cars with rocket engines that could fly, a bit like Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. But he had a briefcase. He could record people's brain patterns, right? And he could then pass them over to his nine-year-old son, Joe, through the big rat, which is the thing on the right.

And when he was wearing these special glasses, he would then be able to do the things that the person with that brain pattern had. So you see, his dad would have recorded Lewis Hamilton's brain pattern, put it on Joe, and then Joe would have gone off and driven the car perfectly, wouldn't he? Yeah? So there you are. I've whetted your appetite for some old Gerry Andersons. But honestly, if we're thinking a bit more seriously, the apostles must have gulped at the thought that, you know, when God is meant to show up and do something miraculous or come in some power, what's going to happen?

They must have been a little bit nervous. So I just want to touch on what is an apostle tonight? Who were they? I just want to go through these names and just remind you a little bit about what we know about them, the uniqueness of the apostles, and some lessons for us.

[2:38] That's where I'm going. So what is an apostle? Apostle, and we have it, the word in our text comes, it says he calls 12 disciples to himself, and then in verse 2, these are the names of the 12 apostles.

And the word in Greek is apostolos, and this is derived from the word apostolene, which is to send. And the unusual thing is this word only appears in the New Testament, so we don't find it in the Old Testament.

It has this emphasis on the idea of being commissioned. In fact, you could just turn ahead because we will refer to this.

Have a look over to Mark 3, because there are some other things mentioned there. Because in our text, we had that they were given authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal diseases.

But in Mark 3, which is a parallel passage, and I'm looking at verse 13 onwards, he appointed 12, that they might be with him, and we'll come back to that, that he might send them out to preach.

[3:52] That's not in the text we had, and to have authority over demons. So there is some elements here of the commission, and he is sent on, the apostles are sent on a definite mission.

They have, as it were, the authority of the sender, the full authority of the sender, and they are accountable to the sender. That's the idea. There is, though, if you're wondering what in the Old Testament, there is a similar word in the Old Testament, which is a Hebrew word, Salah, which is, if you looked up 1 Kings 14, you don't need to do that at the moment.

But there is this idea of this being sent. This is a story, Ahijah, the prophet, Jeroboam is seeking some knowledge from this prophet about how things are going.

And the prophet responds by saying, I am sent to you with bad news, really, about your kingdom and where it's going. But the word send has this idea, this is the word Salah.

And related to this, the term Shaliyah has developed, meaning sent one. I think I'm correct in saying you won't actually find the exact word in the Old Testament, but the idea of it in Genesis 24, you'll know the story where Abraham sends a senior servant off to go and find a wife for Isaac.

[5:21] And you could imagine also, without mobile phones and email, that he's gone a few days' journey and he's got to make a decision. He says, all right, now I've got this, I've just got to go back and talk to Abraham.

And then he could, you know, you could see this going on madness. But he was given authority to work these details out. And that is the nearest thing we have.

And all I'm really drawing attention to is this idea of, from the root word of Salah, of Shaliyah, is in the Old Testament, just in the Jewish community, but had the idea of being, you know, legal or, you know, you had authority to act fully on the person's behalf.

But in the New Testament, this word has a wider missionary emphasis. Okay? So who were the apostles? Jesus commissioned the 12 of them.

And these are the names of them. And I've just referred you to Mark 3, where we just pick up a couple of other things that they were asked to do. So without more ado, let me just give you a little bit on each of these 12 apostles.

[6:27] We have Simon, who is called Peter, meaning rock. We get the meaning of rock in John 1, 42. He is brother to Andrew.

He came from Bethsaida. I haven't got a map with me, but this is on the north shore of Lake Galilee. And he worked as a fisherman. He was married when he was called to be a disciple.

Simon Peter is part of an inner circle of three apostles, which includes James and John, who were together with Jesus on several important occasions.

One of those would be the Transfiguration, and there will be others. He was an extrovert talker, often saying the wrong thing.

What else is he famous for? I'll never deny you, he said. And then before the cock crowed, three times he had denied Jesus, three times.

[7:30] Then we have Andrew, who is Peter's brother. He started as a disciple of John the Baptist, but he left John for Jesus when Jesus said, look, the Lamb of God is coming.

You can see that in John 1. He was also a fisherman with his brother in Bethsaida. And later on, he lived with Simon Peter and his wife in Capernaum.

He was the one who bought the boy with five loaves and two fishes to Jesus. But he, like you might have expected, how far will this go among so many?

He didn't really know. And we have James and John. These are brothers. They're also sons of Zebedee and Salome. They're also fishermen.

There's a lot of fishermen in this group. And as we've mentioned, part of the inner core group along with Simon Peter. John's writing suggests he was the apostle of love.

[8:33] That's a lot in his writings. However, without going through every bit of it, in the Gospels, they come across James and John as hard and arrogant and self-seeking.

When Jesus had sent them ahead of him to make preparations in a Samaritan village and they didn't quite get the welcome they wanted, they were coming back saying, shall we call down fire on these people?

And Jesus was having to calm them down. And in the kingdom, these are the people who asked Jesus, can we sit at your right hand and your left hand?

They probably thought the kingdom was an earthly kingdom of Israel, but nevertheless, it was an outrageous idea that in the kingdom could they have these senior positions. sons of thunder, I think I put down there as well. That's what, in Mark 3, they were referred to in that way. And we have Philip.

[9:32] He was from Bethsaida, an early disciple. In the feeding of the 5,000, he's the one that Jesus tested him a little by saying, where can we go buy the bread?

And he just thought, certainly no idea of the miraculous here. It would take six months' wages to buy enough to help anyone. And then a little bit later, Jesus said to him, if you really know me, you will know the Father.

And Philip said, show us the Father and that will be enough for us. And Jesus, really rebuking him, said, don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you such a long time?

So, we're not quite through the list. This is not looking like the A1 team have switched on fully to everything that Jesus is about, is it?

Bartholomew, his name appears in the list of the apostles, but not elsewhere in the New Testament. There might be others here who know better than this, but the little I've read suggests it could be another name for Nathaniel.

[10:40] If it is, he was known for saying, can anything good come out of Nazareth? And then, shortly after that, when he met Jesus, he was saying, Rabbi, you are the Son of God, the King of Israel.

But we don't know so much there. Thomas, best known for doubting when Jesus had appeared to the other disciples, but not to him. But then a week later, Jesus appears to Thomas, and Thomas, indeed, falls down, my Lord and my God.

He was also the one who said, we don't know where you're going, and how can we know the way? And then Jesus was saying, I am the way, truth and the life. Matthew, in Mark and Luke, he's called Levi.

He was a tax collector, called to follow Jesus. And what do we know about tax collectors and the Romans? Romans? Well, the Romans liked him because he was collecting money to give to the Romans.

But the Jews and the people in the rural areas, well, it was pretty known that they collected more than they needed. And Matthew probably pocketed a good bit more than he should.

[11:52] They were not liked by the Jews. And early after his call, he threw a banquet at his home and the Pharisees observed, it made the Pharisees observe that Jesus was eating with sinners and tax collectors.

So the Pharisees didn't like that. And we hear about James, son of Alphaeus, or James the younger. I pass on that by saying there's not very much told us about him.

And Thaddeus, sometimes known as Judas, son of James, we don't know much about him either. Then we have Simon the Zealot. And the Zealots, they were the people who hated Rome and led revolts against Rome because they didn't like paying taxes.

They didn't like the idea of acknowledging Caesar as a king when there was only one God. So you wouldn't, of all the people we have mentioned, you wouldn't really expect to find Simon the Zealot anti-Rome in the same group as Matthew, the tax collector.

Because, but for the grace of God, they would be at each other's throats and someone would have to stop them killing each other. Yeah? Where else did we get to there?

[13:08] Yeah, that was it. Then we have Judas, the treasurer who became the betrayer. He was always over-concerned about money. and when Mary anointed Jesus with costly ointment, he was the one who said, why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor?

But he didn't really care about the poor. He was just quite used, it says there, as keeper of the money back, he used to help himself to what was in there. That was Judas. Judas.

So overall, can I ask you, if you were trying to bring the kingdom, some new kingdom to the world, would you choose a group like this? Would any of them be recognised amongst us as potential new leaders in our church?

We might have to scratch our heads as we were looking out on this motley crew. Certainly, if you wanted to turn the world upside down, you might not.

They were very ordinary, but commissioned by Jesus Christ to do extraordinary things.

[14:19] And with him for a while, that was part of the deal, to be trained and then sent out to drive out demons, to heal diseases, to preach the gospel.

And we can't get away from, I'm not going to be able to go and pick many examples, but there are, you know, that there is power accompanying their works, which is how the kingdom was being established and making its name.

So they were to obey their instructions in dependence on God in such a way that left God responsible for the consequences. So there is a brief introduction to who they were.

Now I want to move on to the uniqueness of the apostles. And you might want to turn to 1 John 1, which is where Ruth took the second reading.

that which was from the beginning, let me just get there myself, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched.

[15:43] This we proclaim concerning the word of life. Do you get the clear idea that the apostles were speaking as eyewitnesses?

They were all eyewitnesses of the resurrection and of being with Jesus. And they were proclaiming what they had seen and heard. Yes, the spirit of God was empowering them, but they had actually seen it with their own eyes.

So that was the basis of what they were proclaiming. So that you also may have fellowship.

Now turn over to 2 Peter 1. This is quite a significant passage also. Turn back to 2 Peter 1, not far back.

And let's just read together verses 16 to 19. For we did not follow cleverly devised stories when we told you about the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ in power, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

[17:00] He received honour and glory from God the Father when the voice came to him from the majestic glory saying, This is my son whom I love.

With him I am well pleased. We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven and we were with him on the sacred mountain. Interesting just pausing there before I read the next verse.

That was a very special experience to see. something they wouldn't have forget. A voice from heaven. And that was even bright light around Jesus too.

But then he goes on and it does say this, We also have, in verse 19, But we also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable. And you will do well to pay attention to it as to a light shining in a dark place.

So they were very aware of these first-hand experiences but they were very much pointing to the prophetic message because they were very much part of bringing the teaching that is in our Bible.

[18:11] We have the prophetic message as something made reliable. And then we know the story having had the twelve, we know that Judas betrays Jesus and if you wanted to turn back to Acts 1 and verses 20 onwards, you will see there, I won't read it out for you, but you'll see there that Judas comes out of the twelve by his gross sin and by his Satan entering him.

He is replaced. They actually have an offer of a couple of people and they draw lots and it was Barabbas, was it, and Matthias.

But Matthias is chosen to replace Judas to make up the twelve again. Eyewitnesses is the idea really, unique eyewitnesses.

And their authority is in their teaching, not so much in the succession. So, if you wanted to look up Acts 12, you'll find that later on when just naturally one of them dies, we don't suddenly find, oh, we must maintain the twelve and they're trying to draw lots again.

There is no attempt to find another to make up the twelve. We do hear, outside of this group of twelve, Paul becomes an apostle by a direct appointment of Christ.

[19:42] he is able to bear witness to the resurrection. Jesus actually appeared to him, but he never asserted membership of the twelve. And it just leads me to say on this point that you should be quite clear that the Catholics, if I understand, the Catholics believe that the popes, the line of popes are in an apostolic succession and that therefore they have

a significant authority.

I'm not going to put the spotlight on it now, I think they build a lot on Peter, you are Peter and on this rock I build my church, but that is not a verse that gives you a proof text for why the apostles' authority is passed on in that way.

It is the teaching of the apostles which has the authority. And of course the problem that this does give, if you are in the Catholic Church, is that you have the Bible as the authority, the word of God, but you've also got these key figures like the current pope who is almost equal to and has the same authority as this.

And if he says something a little bit new or different, you treat him with the same authority. And sometimes he might be saying stuff which conflicts and then what do you do? So it's a real model, but it is not taught in the Bible that there is this succession of always someone in this line giving authority.

It's also likely that James, the Lord's brother, was an apostle, and if you looked up those verses it would suggest it. So there is a core group of twelve, but there are one or two others who were witnesses to Christ's resurrection who also had significant authority.

[21:27] authority. And we touched on it in reading. He appointed the twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to drive out in pure spirits and to heal every disease.

And can I touch on the significance of the number twelve? Perhaps not a thing you might have thought I would have gone to, but you may remember the episode on Mount Carmel with Elijah and God's prophets are all in hiding or just coming out of hiding and the prophets of Baal are dominating and there's this contest, you remember this?

And in this rather beautiful story, especially when you think that the Baal worshippers were all into imitative magic and they were given their chance to copy what looked like flames trying to get Baal to answer.

And in Elijah, very interestingly how when it's his turn to call on the living God, he pours water over everything. When you think how the Baals were trying to get copying magic, that must have been a real poke in the eye to their religion.

But as Elijah is building, in fact if you don't want to look it up, I won't look it up at the moment because I know that 1 Kings 18, 31, as Elijah is attending to the altar, he's getting 12 stones.

[22:58] And it's very clear there that each of one is for each of the tribes of Israel. And this nation of Israel that was in something of a mess here, he was trying to re-establish the unity of the number 12.

And then look up Revelation 21. 21. Because I think what is clear, well I'll read this first and then we'll draw the, if you get there before I do, you could read it out with a loud voice.

Revelation 21, 10 to 14. I have got there. He carried me away, this is a view of the new Jerusalem, to a mountain, great and high, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

It shone with the glory of God and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper clear as crystal. It had a great high wall with 12 gates and with 12 angels at the gates.

On the gates were written the names of the 12 tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west.

[24:18] But then it goes on to say the wall of the city had 12 foundations, and on them were the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb. So in the view of the new Jerusalem, can you see how important it was that we know very well that the Old Testament people were built on those 12 tribes?

But there is a change going on here in the people of God in the course of how Matthew is going on. They are being reformed under the direction of the apostles and in that new heavens and the new earth both are there, some in the foundations and some on the gates.

So 12 tribes were on the 12 gates and the 12 apostles they're named on the foundations of the new Jerusalem. Jerusalem. It would be fair to say although we've just touched on them being appointed, as you might guess, whilst Jesus was still around, their activity was fairly limited because he was the one who was doing most of the preaching and the miracles apart from where they'd been given specific tasks.

But after Pentecost this changes enormously and you'll know without us going there that we have the sermon in Acts 2 from Peter. This Jesus who you've put to death, he has been raised to life and we hear stories of 3,000 being added to their number and truly examples of the power that they were being given to waken up people.

Now, their teaching was foundational and we're touching on that, it's in that picture there of the New Jerusalem. Let me just give you a little diagram from my architecture and building background about foundations.

[26:08] Chris will probably appreciate this as an engineer as well. I did you two little scribbles on ways to build a wall. So I could build a little trench in my earth about a foot deep and put my masonry bricks and blocks down there and I could go up two stories, say, or I could go down a bit deeper and I could put a piece of concrete down there and I could give my wall a proper foundation and you might think, well, sometimes if you want the quick way around and it hasn't rained for a while, the one on the left looks quite appealing because it's not half as much work.

bad weather has come, well, what happens to walls and buildings that are on bad foundations? I found a couple of pictures for you.

There's a terrible cracking in brickwork and suddenly you're not so much worried, oh, if only I'd spent a little more time because now you've got to pull all this down and do it again. there's a house that really has better days.

So if you were a child coming back saying, come and see my bedroom on the first floor, I'm not sure you can get up there. I think it probably is.

Something happened here. It might have been after an earthquake but it certainly didn't have the right foundations. But we don't often think about them. You don't often see them. It's interesting, isn't it? The New Jerusalem, the names of the apostles are on the foundations.

[27:42] But actually normally, you don't see them. But you do build on them and they've got to be reliable. So Paul speaks to the church at Ephesus.

Consequently, you are fellow citizens with God's people, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. And we were hearing about cornerstones, weren't we, this morning.

But this is the foundation foundation that we have to build on. This is the solid foundation and if you try and rearrange it, there's also that lovely verse in 1 Corinthians 3, no one can lay a foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

2 Peter 1, 12 to 21, we went there earlier didn't we actually? We got muddled, we have I think. No we didn't. 2 Peter 1, 12, 12, 2 Peter 1, and verses 12 to 21.

[28:59] Peter says, so I will always remind you of these things even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. I think it right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body because I know that I will soon be put aside.

As our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me and I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things. For, and then we did read this didn't we, for we did not follow cleverly invented stories.

We were eyewitnesses and we heard the voice but we also have the prophetic message as something more reliable. So that's the main part of what I wanted to do and I just want to draw three or four lessons.

I wanted to learn from the example of the apostles with the proviso that of course we can see certain things about them that were very unique that we won't be able to repeat.

They had a unique authority and powers that we cannot copy. But however, and do turn to Matthew 28 because this was touched on last week.

[30:12] and the great commission does come through to us. It was given to the disciples. Let's find that.

Verse 18 of Matthew 28. Then Jesus came to them and said, all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have

commanded you.

Surely I am with you always to the very end of the age. Although we, if you think about this in several ways, the apostles were around at a time when the kingdom was just getting going. They had a unique role. There were more signs and wonders accompanying that to authenticate and that their message was true.

There was a special power to their preaching. But nevertheless we, who might not have the same unique authority or powers, we do have the Holy Spirit and we are sent to make disciples of all nations.

[31:28] And if you also see the pattern, if the apostles had to spend a lot of time with Jesus, well we do if we want to be effective in going out and making disciples of all nations.

So that's one thing we can learn from their example. The second one is just to be grateful for the scriptures as a good foundation.

In Acts 2 it says they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. If you had to sum up what a church is about in four easy phrases, that's quite a good one.

Devoted themselves. The apostles teaching wasn't lots of really high flying stuff that you had to have a degree to understand. It boiled down to Christ died according to the scriptures.

He was the payment for sin. He was raised. It was a simple teaching but the warning really was don't change this fundamental teaching.

[32:41] So I put down there, especially as we've been thinking about beware of false teachers who change the foundation design. They start with Christ but then start adding something. Yes, you need that but you also need this.

Doesn't that sound a bit like the Pope? You need the Bible but you also need this. And he can say other things that you've got to obey as well. Beware of false teachers. What about not despising being ordinary?

How we need to just, perhaps we think of, maybe you can think of some well known speakers, maybe you've seen videos on YouTube and they seem so confident, so flowing.

Well, come back and just remember the motley crew that we've looked at here who were frequently hot-headed, arrogant and rude and weak and Jesus was using them.

Jesus is using them very powerfully so we're not to despise being ordinary or being anxious about weakness. I just want to leave with you that thought.

[33:50] My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness. So actually being weak and not feeling able to go out and make disciples of all nations is a good place to be.

Being full of, oh, I can persuade anyone, I do this in my work, I can, you know, that's not what God wants, not what God can use, but being aware of weakness.

So there we are. I did say, just before we sing, we could just open up if anyone has any comments, because it's such a wide-ranging thing, I'm sure I've probably missed something out, but we could just have a minute or two for either additional comments or questions, and then we'll sing, and then if we've got time, which we probably do, we'll split into groups.

So anyone want to add anything or ask any questions that I might not know the answers to? if not, we'll sing.

Good, good, good. You can try. You know, you said revelation, salvation, salvation, Judas.

[35:07] Now, Judas was replaced by Matthias. I think in the way that the Acts passage we looked at, it is quite clear that Matthias took that place, but then other apostles like Paul, although he's very key, he didn't seem to be in that group, but I'm sure he'll still have a very important place in the new heavens and the new earth, don't you think?

Significant for us. Anything else? It's quite apparent that there were others like obviously before, but certainly seem to be taking over.

Who seem to be taking over? Oh, they seem to be, right, yeah. Yeah, those who were elders and pastors and rangers and yeah.

Well, certainly they were training up. I mean, there might not have been apostles going down the line as it were, but certainly other people who were being, they were training and leaving leaders in churches all over the place, weren't they?

Yeah. to be apostles.

[36:45] apostles. But what would they mean by that? What would they think they can, how would they understand it? Because if they think they've got a new voice of authority, well, we've got to be very careful haven't we?

Yeah. And they have masses of followers as well. Yeah. I mean, I think we've been clear in what we've been saying that the revelation of scripture is closed, there is sufficient there.

Jesus and his apostles made that perfectly enough, and we don't need to add to it, and if we try to, we undermine it. I think just speaking more from experience, where you sometimes see in churches people who perhaps have unusual gifts of healing, perhaps almost every time they pray for someone something seems to happen, and sometimes these kind of people get the name of being like a modern day apostle, but you have to be very careful because God may graciously work in a powerful way through someone.

More likely though, I think he tends to spread around who he works through, and if he chose to work in a very powerful way through one person all the time, if that person hasn't got enormous grace and humility, I mean, that person's going to get a bit puffed up, and it's all going to go pear-shaped anyway.

But yes, although people might use the phrase, I mean, as I say, I think the Bible's very clear, we're not expecting new revelation, they might just mean they're a rather lively new leader, and maybe they feel they've got very in touch with God and God is using, well, if they're humble people and God is blessing them, then I will rejoice.

[38:32] I'd rather they didn't call themselves apostles. enough?

There was the other thing, the other weeks, is to resurrect as well. People nowadays are not the spirit. No.

That's right, so that was unique, yes, but nevertheless we do have the spirit, so not in quite the same direct way, but we are given the spirit, and as we go on with him, I think we learn that that is something very much to experience.

Shall we stop there and sing? And then we'll