

The Church of Jesus

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[0 : 0 0] Well, good morning, church. Would you turn with me to Mark, chapter 3, verses 7 through 19. Mark 3, 7 through 19, that's page 787 in the Pew Bible.

As we continue our series in the Gospel of Mark this morning, we come to Mark, chapter 3, verse 7. So let me read our text for us. It'll be on the screens above, too. Let me read, and then I'll pray for us as we come to God's Word.

Picking up in verse 7. Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the sea, and a great crowd followed from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon.

When the great crowd heard all that he was doing, they came to him. And he told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him. For he had healed many, so that all who had diseases pressed around him to touch him.

And whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, You are the Son of God. And he strictly ordered them not to make him known. And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him.

[1 : 1 9] And he appointed twelve whom he also named apostles, 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, Simon, to whom he gave the name Peter, James, the son of Zebedee, and John, the brother of James, to whom he gave the name Boanerges, 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.

Let's pray together. Savior, like a shepherd, lead us as we come now to your word. Help us to hear what your spirit is continuing to say to us through this life-giving message that you've inspired and gifted to us, your church.

Father, our desire is to be who you've created and recreated and redeemed us to be. So help us now in this time to hear what you are saying, to receive it with faithful hearts.

Oh, Lord, do your work in us as we come to your word, we pray. Amen. Well, you know, it's easy at first to kind of miss the significance of what's happening here in our passage.

[2 : 4 5] You know, on the first, it sort of looks like Jesus here in Mark 3 is simply being strategic, right? I mean, the crowds are clearly getting too large for one person to manage.

So Jesus picks a dozen helpers to whom he can delegate some of the responsibility. Perhaps we're reminded of that passage in the Old Testament in Exodus when Moses is kind of overwhelmed by the responsibility of judging the people and deciding their cases.

He's at it kind of day and night. So his father-in-law Jethro comes and says, Moses, you have to find some trustworthy people to help you here or else you're going to wear yourself out. So Moses takes Jethro's advice and it ends up being a really good idea.

But is that what's really going on here in Mark 3 as the crowds are pressing around Jesus and Jesus appoints the twelve? Are we merely learning from Jesus the principles of effective delegation?

Or the key to strategic ministry multiplication? No, there's something much more significant happening here than that. Consider, after all, what Mark tells us about this great crowd in verses 7 through 8.

[3 : 55] They are from Galilee and Judea and Jerusalem and Ijuria and from beyond the Jordan and from around Tyre and Sidon. In other words, nearly everywhere you could find a significant Jewish population in Palestine of the day, even if it was known to be a Gentile area like Tyre and Sidon.

Wherever there was a significant Jewish population in Palestine of the day, they were all coming to Jesus. Last week we saw that some of the Jewish officials had begun turning against Jesus, but despite the rejection of Jesus that was starting among some of the religious officials, all of Israel was beginning to gather to him.

And what they found when they gathered was more than just words, but power. Power over their physical sickness. Power over their spiritual bondage. This was no mere religious revival.

This was revolution. And just as all Israel is gathering to him, Jesus then goes up on a mountain and appoints 12.

And of course that number is not an accident. Everyone around Jesus would have picked up on the symbolism. Every Jew knew that there were 12 tribes in Israel, or at least there had been.

[5 : 16] And those 12 tribes corresponded more or less to the 12 sons of Jacob, the patriarch. Now 10 of those tribes had been lost seven centuries earlier when the Assyrians invaded and carried them off.

But the prophets had spoken of a coming restoration. And a great many Jews were longing for it. The time would come, they believed, when their God would turn everything around and restore his people once again.

And so when Jesus called 12 of his followers apart from the crowds and gave them a special status and a special commission, nobody who heard of it could miss what he was doing.

Jesus was saying more clearly than words could have done that this isn't simply a great healing mission. This isn't simply a time of spiritual renewal. This is the restoration we've all been waiting for.

So what is the significance of this passage? If it's about more than just strategic delegation or ministry multiplication, what is it about?

[6 : 17] Well, ultimately, it's about what it means to be the people of God. The people of God called and created by the very Son of God.

In other words, in appointing the 12, we see in kind of seed form what will be true of the whole church. The church that would come to include not just Jews, but Gentiles as well, as our earlier reading in the service made clear.

Now, that's not to say that the 12 didn't have a unique role in redemptive history. They certainly do. On one level, what's true of the apostles is utterly unique to them and them alone.

The apostles, both the 12 commissioned during Jesus' ministry and a select few like Paul after Jesus' resurrection, think about it, they were personally commissioned by the Lord Jesus to be his authoritative representatives.

They could teach and preach with his very authority and his very name in a way no one else could. Even the miraculous signs that the apostles performed to verify their message was in many ways unique to them.

[7 : 31] You know, this unique role that they had was why their teaching and writings became what we now call the New Testament. These apostolic writings still have authority over all the church because Jesus endowed these particular men by his Holy Spirit with a unique role in laying the foundation of the church.

So that in listening to the apostles, we listen to what the Lord Jesus himself desires for his people. So in that sense, the apostles are unique, but in another sense, they represent what would be true for the church throughout its history.

When Jesus came to call and create anew the people of God, when he came to restore Israel and even bring in the lost Gentiles, he began with the 12. And we see in them, even at this earliest stage in Mark 3, what it means to be the church.

So let's consider together what this passage has to tell us about being the church, about being the people of God created by the Son of God.

And first, what we see is that the church exists by the call of Jesus. The church exists by the call of Jesus. Look again at verse 13. Jesus went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him.

[8 : 52] Other translations translate this verse to read, Jesus summoned those whom he willed. It is the solemn and powerful call of Jesus that creates the church.

Discipleship ultimately begins not with our decision to follow Jesus, as if we're doing God some favor by becoming Christians and joining his movement, right? No, it begins when God summons us out of darkness into light.

When the Lord summons us out of spiritual death into everlasting life. And notice that this call comes from Jesus, but it also leads to him as well.

He's the beginning and the end. He summoned those whom he desired, and they came to who? They came to him. This scene of Jesus on a mountain calling the twelve.

You know, the clearest Old Testament echo isn't Moses and Jethro trying to manage the crowds, right? The clearest Old Testament echo is of the Lord God on Mount Sinai, constituting the twelve tribes of Israel formally, covenantally, as his people, his nation.

[10 : 06] That's the echo here. Morna Hooker, the great New Testament scholar, and her commentary on Mark makes a very interesting observation, and I'm paraphrasing, but she basically says, you know, if Jesus had chosen eleven apostles, then it would have been clear that he saw himself as part of a renewed people of God, right?

But he didn't choose eleven. He chose twelve. In other words, Jesus wasn't part of the people. He was the Lord of the people. He isn't a new Moses sorting out duties.

He's the sovereign Lord calling the people into their very existence. So the church then isn't just another social club or non-profit organization.

It's the people called into existence by the word of the sovereign Lord. So I wonder, friend, have you experienced this call?

As God's word is opened up and read and explained, as you hear the words of Jesus preserved in Scripture, proclaimed in the church, do you hear them not just as human words, but do you hear in them the divine word, the divine voice calling you, summoning you to come to him?

[11 : 27] And in response, have you turned and believed in him? Believe not merely in a set of doctrines, although sound doctrine is wonderful.

Believe not merely in a code of ethics, although right living is wonderfully liberating. Believe not merely in a set of spiritual practices, but have you entrusted your life to him, the living Lord, who calls?

That's where it begins for every Christian. That's how the church exists at all, by the call of Christ. You know, we get our existence not by a common set of interests or by a joint social agenda or by a shared religious history.

None of those things are why the church exists. It exists because Christ calls us into existence. And he's calling you today.

And if that's true, if we exist by the call of Jesus, then certainly how we order our life together, the purpose, the goal towards which we exist must also be centered in the word of Christ as well.

[12 : 42] And that brings us to our second point. We see here that the church exists by the call of Jesus, but second, we see that the church exists for the mission of Jesus. The church exists for the mission of Jesus.

Look at verses 14 and 15. And he appointed 12, whom he also named apostles, so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

So notice the twofold purpose in these verses. First, that they might be with him. And second, that he might send them out. So first, Jesus wanted the 12 to spend time with him, to be with him, because it was in fellowship with him, in communion with him, that they would be formed and changed more and more into who he wanted them to be.

He was going to create them and make them into something. And how was that going to happen? It was going to happen through their fellowship with him, their presence with him, because it was there that they would learn what it meant to be truly human.

As they beheld and as they fellowshiped and as they communed with the one who was fully God and fully human, who was the true human, the second Adam, they would learn how to be human again.

[13 : 57] But Jesus also had a plan to send them out. That's what literally the word apostle means. It means a sent one, an emissary.

Their work would not simply be in beholding him and communing with him, but also in joining him in the work of restoration and reclamation and renewal.

Theirs would be a mission of liberation, preaching good news, casting out demons. They would be sent by him.

And all of this is true for the church today. You know, it's not merely some human agenda that drives the church. And when the church has fallen captive to worldly or human agendas, it's been disastrous.

The church exists for the mission of Jesus. And today this mission has the same twofold shape, to be with him and to be sent by him.

[15 : 02] The life of the church is both contemplative and active, right? It's contemplative. It's worshipful. We're meant to enjoy Christ together, to worship him, to commune with him, to rest in him.

Like Mary, to sit at his feet and listen to him. And in beholding him, we become like him. But the life of the church is not just contemplative.

It's also active. We have a great passion to see the gospel proclaimed, to see the darkness driven back, and to see Christ's name honored among all people.

And again, all of this is a work of liberation, isn't it? We proclaim the good news of the forgiveness of sins through Christ's death and resurrection.

Friends, the heart of the message of the church is nothing less than reconciliation with God. What could be more liberating than that? To be set free from sin and death and judgment.

[16 : 06] And we also stand against the forces of evil at work around us. We see in our text that Jesus gave the apostles the authority to cast out demons.

And you know, the church still has spiritual authority today. Now perhaps he isn't calling you and me literally to cast out an unclean spirit, although maybe some of you have experienced something like that.

Certainly in other parts of the world, this is a very real thing. But even so, even if that's not our particular calling to perform literal exorcisms, the battle that we wage isn't against flesh and blood.

There is a very real spiritual battle going on. And it is through prayer and mercy and generosity and peacemaking and by speaking the truth in love that this war is waged.

And so we are sent into the world to be salt and light. And so the church exists not to serve itself, but to serve Christ and his mission.

[17 : 12] We see here that the church exists for the mission of Jesus. Now the third thing our passage shows us about being the church is this.

The church exists in the unity of Jesus. So we exist by his call and for his mission, but we exist in the unity of Christ. You know, as we consider a little more closely the men that Jesus called to be his apostles in verses 16 through 19, and you can kind of scan through their names there in that list, you know, as we start to really look a little deeper, we see how radical this group was.

Of course, they were all Jewish and they were all mostly from Galilee, but consider their differences. In verse 17, we're told about James and John, two brothers to whom Jesus gives the nickname Sons of Thunder, right?

That's a pretty sweet nickname, isn't it? You know? He called Peter like a stone, but you get to be the Sons of Thunder. That's pretty sweet. Now, it's possible that this nickname means something like the loud ones or the hot-tempered ones.

Okay, maybe it's not that great of a nickname. It's sort of Jesus maybe poking a little fun at them, right? So here are James and John, the Sons of Thunder. But then you have other apostles on this list about whom we know very little apart from their names.

[18 : 35] History is nearly silent about them. Of course, that doesn't mean they didn't fulfill their call faithfully, boldly proclaiming Christ, but, you know, Sons of Thunder, loud, boisterous, fiery, they apparently were not.

But it wasn't just personality differences that was being united here in this apostolic band, in this nascent church. Consider the difference between Matthew, the tax collector, who we met a little earlier in Mark's gospel, Levi, also called Matthew.

Consider the difference between Matthew, the tax collector, and the other apostle we meet on this list, Simon, the zealot. Tax collectors, you remember, were collaborators with Rome, basically.

You know, they spent their time collecting money on behalf of the empire and kind of robbing their own people. But zealots, zealots were the party in the first century.

They were the movement in the first century who were ready to take up arms against Rome. Right? The zealots were the ones who were thinking, you know, maybe a militaristic overthrow of the Romans is probably our best bet.

[19 : 48] So here are two men with utterly different, what we might call today, political backgrounds. One who lived life collaborating with Rome and the other who lived life hoping one day to overthrow it.

Together. together. In the same group around Jesus. Could these differences ever be overcome?

And yet what we see in the apostles is yes. A former zealot and a former tax collector united by a common Lord engaged in a common mission.

You see, their allegiance to the Lord Jesus, the reality of his call on their lives, took precedence over these former allegiances and identities.

What they held in common in Christ was far superior to what divided them. Now I think we can, we know that Levi sort of left his tax collecting booth to follow Jesus and we can imagine probably something similar was the same true for Simon.

[20 : 58] You know, he wasn't out there plotting political and military overthrow anymore. But do we imagine after coming to Christ, do we imagine Matthew and Simon always agreeing about everything?

Right? Probably not. And it's the same today. Christians don't always agree with each other about a whole range of things.

And it's good and right to develop convictions about those things. But united by a common Lord, we can treat each other with charity and with honor and we can learn from each other.

Perhaps we might not be persuaded by one another at the end of the day and our differences, some of them might still remain. And yet, we can still embrace each other as fellow family members of the people of God.

In the early church, this unity in Christ would become even more radical than we see it here in the calling of the twelve as the gospel goes forth and Gentiles are added to their number. Suddenly, the differences that are being united in Christ are even more profound.

[22 : 12] And as the gospel continued to spread throughout church history, the cultural diversity of the church continued to expand. But the church continues to exist in its great diversity in the unity of Christ.

And so, in our own local church, we learn to love one another. Even though we are different, we view one another as brothers and sisters in the same family.

Christ has embraced us and so we turn and we embrace one another. And the backgrounds in our church family here are wildly different, are they not?

Cultural backgrounds, educational backgrounds, different genders, different races, different classes, but united in Christ. No, we don't always agree about secondary issues, do we?

Sometimes we have lively discussions around the proverbial dinner table. But we don't let those things divide us or sow seeds of contempt and scorn.

[23 : 21] We continue to love each other for Christ's sake because we have been loved. And that brings us to our last point. The fourth and last thing we see here is that the church exists because of the grace of Jesus.

So it's his call and his mission and his unity that ultimately exists because of his grace. You know, in verse 19, we read the last name in the list of the 12, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

And then that final note of this list of the 12 here casts a bit of a shadow over the whole passage, doesn't it? The 12 would not be a perfect band of brothers.

Right? They would not in themselves be the new creation, the new people of God. In fact, in the end, they would all deny Jesus and abandon him.

And Judas, one of the 12, would even be the one who betrayed him. And yet none of this was a surprise to Jesus.

[24 : 31] Think about it. Jesus could have chosen someone else to join the 12. Right? The sovereign Lord could have chosen someone else.

It didn't have to be Judas. He didn't have to be betrayed. But Jesus didn't choose someone else. Why? Why? Because Jesus knew that his mission was about more than just healing the sick.

It was about more than just casting out demons. It was about more than just building a team and expanding his influence. Jesus had come to address the deepest human need imaginable. Jesus had come as the remedy for sin.

And that meant he had to go the way of the cross. You see, Jesus' choice of Judas was ultimately the choice of the cross. The choice to undergo the betrayal, the denial, the abandonment.

This was the choice to lay down his life for his people. The work of renewing and recreating the people of God was going to cost more than a few busy days of ministry by the sea.

[25 : 46] It was going to cost more than a few long days on the mountainside training his disciples. This work that Jesus had come to do was going to cost him everything. And yet he was willing to do it through his own choice.

He freely chose to be betrayed so that he might choose to forgive your sins and mine. So we, all of us, stand as members of Christ's body, Christ's church because of sheer, undeserved, costly grace.

Christ doesn't call us into his people because we've earned it, but because he's earned it. So don't you see how much he loves you, Christian?

Who would ever choose in their right mind to be betrayed, right? And yet he did for you, for us. And it's this grace, this love that stands at the very bottom, the bedrock of the church.

This is the cornerstone. Christ, rich in grace, full of steadfast love. This is the grace on which we stand.

[27 : 05] And this is the grace that we extend to others through the mission that he's called us to. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we give you praise as the Lord of the church.

Thank you that it is in your deep love and grace and through your sovereign call that we exist to be a part of your people. Oh Lord, help our hearts to be full of that grace and love so that as we go forth on your mission, we might truly be your ambassadors, seeing your kingdom advance in our place, and our time to your great glory.

We pray this in your name. Amen.