



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Mark 3:1-19 Mark

“Conflict, Cures and Commission”

TRANSCRIPT

The passage this morning is Mark 3:1-19. Mark 3:1, we read:

[Prayer] “He again entered again into a synagogue; and a man was there with a withered hand. They were watching Him *to see* if He would heal him on the Sabbath, in order that they might accuse Him. He said to the man with the withered hand, ‘Rise and come forward!’ And He said to them, ‘Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save a life or to kill?’ But they kept silent. After looking around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ And he stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out and immediately *began* taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, *as to* how they might destroy Him.

“Jesus withdrew to the sea with His disciples; and a great multitude from Galilee followed; and *also* from Judea, and from Jerusalem, and from Idumea, and beyond the Jordan, and the vicinity of Tyre and Sidon, a great number of people heard of all that He was doing and came to Him. And He told His disciples that a boat should stand ready for Him because of the multitude, in order that they might not crowd Him; for He had healed many, with the result that all those who had afflictions pressed about Him in order to touch Him. Whenever the unclean spirits beheld Him, they would fall down before Him and cry out saying, ‘You are the Son of God!’ And He earnestly warned them not to reveal His identity.

“And He went up to the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, that they might be with

Him and that He *might* send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), and James, the *son* of Zebedee, and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, ‘Sons of Thunder’); and Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.” May the Lord bless this reading of His Word and bless our time of study in it together. Let’s bow now in a word of prayer.

Gracious heavenly Father, we thank You and praise You for the privilege we have to come together and to study the Scriptures. We thank You for that privilege because we know it is through no work of our own that we gather here as Your people, but as a result of Your calling of the atonement that Your Son made when You sent Him into the world to purchase a people for Yourself. Father, as we trace back all of our privileges to Your throne, we trace them back to the throne of grace and we are reminded that we have nothing through any merit or work of our own, but solely and strictly through Your sovereign grace.

And we thank You for that and pray, Father, that as we open the Scriptures this morning, consider the work and words of Your Son, that you might bless us with an understanding of who He is and of our relationship to Him, the duties that are incumbent upon us by virtue of that relationship, and we pray that we would seek to serve You in a way that’s honoring to His name in a way that brings glory to You and is greatly beneficial to Your people. That is a great privilege, Father, that we can not only study Your Word which You have given to us by Your grace, but we can go out from here to serve one another. One of the great services that You have given us in Your grace is the privilege to intervene on behalf of one another in prayer. You’ve made us priests and invited us to come boldly to the throne of grace and make our petitions for one another, as well as ourselves.

And we do that. We remember those who have needs. As we were reminded of in the announcements awhile ago to pray for those on the prayer request. We do. We pray for various individuals, Father, for **Howard Pryor**’s mother, we pray that You’d bless her and extend mercy to her, and bless Howard and **Ann**, and their time with her. We pray for **Betty Davenport** and ask that You would extend mercy to her

in her time of suffering. **Bob Messick**, and **Rainell May**, and Father, as we go down the list of names here, we remember them. Those whose names aren't listed. Those who are undergoing physical difficulty, who perhaps are enduring it silently without mentioning it, we pray for them. You know their needs. You know them far better than we do. And we pray that You'd extend help and mercy to them.

Pray for those who are undergoing financial difficulty. Pray that You'd provide employment where there is unemployment. We pray that You'd provide for their material needs and move those of us who can help to supply out of our substance. We have, Father, because You've given. And many of us have much and we thank You for that. Pray that with what we have we will not become satisfied with ourselves and our condition and begin in our prosperity to forget about the source of those blessings, but we will remember daily that what we have, we have as a gift, and may we be generous with that, generous with what we have in terms of possessions, but also with our time and our efforts. May we apply them to Your kingdom, Your ministry and this church.

Father, we pray for ourselves spiritually. We pray that You'd bless us as an assembly, that we would grow in the grace, the knowledge of our Lord, and that we would not simply be a people that know, but we act upon that knowledge, so that we would be an active people, serving You faithfully. We pray to that end that You'd bless us now as we look at the Scriptures, and we consider them and think about Your Son and what He's done that You would conform us to His image and build us up in the faith. We pray for our nation. We pray that You'd bless our leaders. We pray that You'd give them wisdom, that this land would be guided and governed by good principles.

Bless us, Father. Pray for blessing materially, but we recognize that those blessings fade. They don't last. That it's the spiritual blessings that last for eternity. And so we pray that You'd bless this land spiritually and that You might use us in this community and use us in various parts of the land in which we travel, from week to week, and pray that You'd give us a good, clear, and faithful testimony to You. And bless our time now, Father, as we sing our final hymn. We pray that it would be used of You to prepare our hearts, prepare our minds as we study. We pray that all

that is done will be done to Your glory and to our edification. Pray these things in our Savior’s name, Amen.

[Message] Our subject this morning is entitled, “Conflict, Cures and the Commission,” but we could subtitle that, “Pure Religion.” What do you think of when you think of religion? We’re not very comfortable with that word, I think, but James defines pure religion as something that we should strive for. Well, what is pure religion? What is true religion? Is it rituals? Is it rules? Is it incense, altars, temples, cathedrals, those kinds of things? Well, probably not, you say, but is it attending church services regularly, saying grace over meals, singing hymns, maybe leading a Sunday school class? We’re more inclined to consider those who follow that line as spiritual as representatives of pure religion.

But our Lord and the apostles make it clear that true religion is mercy and service. We see that in our passage. It divides into three sections, into three events. The first involving a conflict between our Lord and the Pharisees. Next, the Lord curing or healing the multitudes. And then thirdly, the Lord commissioning the 12 disciples. Now each of those seem unrelated, really, and yet I think that we can see within them a common theme, and that is a theme of service, serving the Lord, serving our fellow man.

You see that particularly in the first event, the conflict. Christ has been involved in a series of conflicts with the scribes and Pharisees which began in chapter 2. With chapter 3, we have the fifth of these conflicts and it’s another incident that shows our Lord’s attitude toward the sabbath. Previously, the Pharisees had criticized Him for allowing His disciples to pick and eat grain on the sabbath as they were passing through this grainfield. But the Lord responded by declaring that, “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”

And then having made that statement, which really put their view of the sabbath in perspective, gave a true perspective, God’s perspective to the fourth commandment, He then states in verse 28 His authority for saying that because He’s made quite a declaration, one that not only affected their view of the sabbath, but really their whole perspective on religion. He says in 2:28 that he is the “Lord of the Sabbath.” Well now on another sabbath day, He proves that He is the Lord of the Sabbath.

The scene is a synagogue in Galilee, where a man was present with a withered hand. The opposition was also present. Mark doesn't identify them. He simply writes, “And they were watching Him.” But it's clear from the context, specifically from verse 6, that they were the Pharisees. And as we might suspect, their purpose in being there wasn't friendly. It was to gain something with which “they might accuse Him,” Mark writes. They knew His attitude on the Sabbath. They knew that He had little respect for their traditions, not that He had little respect for the Sabbath. He had great respect for that. He always kept the Sabbath law. He was an obedient man, but their traditions really went contrary to the Sabbath. It was their traditions that He had little respect for. And so they had come, Mark writes, to see if He would heal this man on the Sabbath.

Now, healing was the work of a physician and, as you know, work was prohibited on the Sabbath day, and rabbinical law prohibited healing on the Sabbath except in cases when life is in danger, that is when a person might be in danger of losing their life. All other forms of medical treatment were forbidden. So there are a number of examples of this, of the kind of treatment that was allowed and what was forbidden. For example, if a man had a fracture, if he'd broken his arm, it couldn't be attended to on the sabbath. If a person had sprained his or her foot, he couldn't apply cold water to it to relieve the pain because life was not in danger. So a person in order to maintain these strict, rigid rules of the sabbath would have to endure the pain until the sun went down and a new day began.

Well, I think these things and many other examples of that show, again, that by their traditions these scribes and Pharisees had made the sabbath a burden rather than a blessing. The Lord had corrected their interpretation of the sabbath, but in doing that, He had challenged their authority. And so they were looking for an opportunity to accuse Him. Now that's very interesting. They don't doubt that He can heal. They weren't there to see if He could heal. They were convinced that He could do that. They knew that He had the power to heal. They knew that He could do miracles. But they weren't believing in Him. In fact, they were more entrenched than ever in their resistance to Him. The fact that He could heal and had done some healing had really inflamed their anger all the more, which goes to show that miracles don't produce faith.

Now, there's no doubt that if we had the power and the authority of the apostles today in order to do miracles as they had done miracles, then we could produce excitement. We could produce a great deal of enthusiasm. If we could do miracles right down here, this place would be filled with people. We'd have to have two or three services. Just look around at some of the large churches today that are doing that, and you see that very thing. But they would not produce saving faith. Faith is produced by a miracle, the miracle of regeneration, perhaps the greatest of all miracles. But that miracle occurs in connection with the preaching of the gospel, not in connection with signs, and wonders, and those kinds of miracles. That's clear from what Peter says in 1 Peter 1:23. “You have been born again not of seed which is perishable but imperishable, *that is*, through the living and abiding word of God.”

I mention this because the idea has become somewhat popular in our day that miraculous signs and wonders are for us, that the powers and the authority of the apostles are for us today, and while those who advocate this may not come out explicitly and say they are necessary for evangelism, they certainly approach that and do state that it's very important and extremely helpful for evangelism, for bringing people to a saving knowledge of our Lord. But as you study the Scriptures, you study the gospels in particular, you see that that just does not stand up under the weight of evidence that we see here, that we see in these religious leaders. They were convinced that Christ could do miracles. They were waiting to see one. They were really hoping to see one. Not to believe in Him, but as Mark writes, “in order that they might accuse Him.”

Well, the Lord knew their intentions. They've said nothing. They're evidently sitting on the front row in the synagogue. That's where men of position, prestige sat in that day. That was the place of honor. And so they're sitting there, saying nothing, but the Lord knew their thoughts. Luke records in Luke 6 that He knew their thoughts. And it's clearly implied here. And yet, rather than cautiously skirt the issue and avoid conflict, our Lord decides to make this a test case. He brings the man forward. He puts him in the midst of the congregation so that all can see him, and then he puts the scribes and the Pharisees in a dilemma.

He asks them a question in verse 4. “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm?” Well, the answer to that is obvious. There's no law against doing good. It's always

lawful to do good. How could a person sin by doing what's right? And if it's right on an ordinary day of the week to do good, why not on the sabbath? The sabbath was intended to be a day that benefited man, not hindered him, and God is more concerned about people than He is about ceremonies, more concerned about people doing good than doing rituals.

The Old Testament is filled with that and these scribes and Pharisees would certainly have been well acquainted with the statements that the prophets made, such as Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 1, and really throughout that major prophecy. But also throughout the minor prophets, those prophets would tell the people that God was sick of their sacrifices and their rituals being carried out with indifferent hearts. It's not that sacrifice and rituals were bad. In that economy, they were not. Under that dispensation, they were prescribed. They were laws. They were to be done. But when they were done with an improper heart, with indifference toward what was signified there, without a genuine relationship to the Lord, it made God sick. He did not like that. He detested it. Moral obedience always comes before ceremonial obedience.

And so the Lord asks this question in verse 4. “Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath?” And then to that He adds this second, “Is it lawful to save a life or to kill?” Now that question has been understood in more than one way. Calvin, for example, interpreted it to mean – and these are his words – “there is little difference between manslaughter and the conduct of him who does not concern himself about relieving a person in distress. Little difference between one who is guilty of manslaughter and one who doesn't do anything for a person that he or she can help.” In other words, there is no middle ground between good and evil. When there is an opportunity to help, we must help. To not act when a need arises is to be guilty of injury.

Now that was evidently somewhat common in that day. If you remember in Luke's telling of the parable of the good Samaritan, there's a man who has been robbed and beaten. He's lying there dying on the side of the road on the way to Jericho. And the first two people that come by, a priest and then a Levite, see him and the first thing they do is when he comes in view, the switch over to the other side of the road and turn a blind eye to him, either because they didn't want to be held up

on their busy journey to wherever they were going, or some think perhaps because if he's dead and they go over and they touch him, they'll become ceremonially impure. It takes a Samaritan, a hated Samaritan, to do the right thing.

Now part of what the Lord is saying in that parable is that to avoid doing good is sin. Those two men, those religious men, were just as guilty as the robbers because they did not render help. Our Lord and the apostles, the apostles make it very clear that true religion, pure religion, Christianity is active in doing good. That's what James says. In James 1:27 he writes this is “pure and undefiled religion.” So on the authority of an apostle, we can speak of Christianity as a religion. It's the only true religion in that way. But he says this is “pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world.” Now he doesn't say to do that except on the sabbath or except on the Lord's day. It's unqualified. It's seven days a week. And it's active. It's active in doing good. And if we want to say it's at all passive, it's passive in not doing evil. It resists that.

Now this isn't simply the ethics of the New Testament. We find that in the Old Testament, as well, and I'm sure that these scribes and Pharisees were well acquainted with Micah and what he wrote in chapter 6 of his prophecy. “He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?” That's all active. There's no room for a passive, uninvolved approach to those in need. Christianity is helpful. Christianity is merciful and active. To refuse to do good when there is an opportunity for doing it is equal to doing evil.

But there may be something more pointed, more piercing in our Lord's question than that. He knew that these men had murder in their hearts. They wanted to be able to accuse Him of breaking the sabbath because that was a capital offense and with that offense in hand, they could then make a charge against Him and with that charge destroy Him. And so His point may have been is God better served on the sabbath by saving a life, that is by healing, or by plotting to kill? And in that way, He exposes their hypocrisy. Once again, He's pierced into their hearts. He's read the motives of their hearts. He's in a very subtle way brought out before them a reality that's in their own hearts and the real nature of their religion, their hypocrisy.



They were sitting under the teaching of God’s Word and they were plotting murder. These Pharisees and these scribes were sitting there at the feet of the Son of God listening to Him unfold the truth of God, and all the time they had murder in their heart.

It’s appalling and yet it’s not unusual. People can come to a church. They can come into this very church, sing hymns, bow their heads in prayer, sit quietly during the Scripture reading and the sermon, seem to be paying very close attention, and all the time have murder in their hearts. Husbands and wives quietly sit brooding over a fight that’s taken place, nursing a grudge. Businessman may sit there, angry over some events that have taken place. Perhaps unfair events, begin to nurse those kind of thoughts. We say, “Well, that’s not murder. That’s just a bad thought.” And yet, John says, “Whoever hateth his brother is a murderer.” That’s where it begins. Anger and hate must be dealt with, and that’s why Paul writes, “Do not let the sun go down on your anger and do not give the devil an opportunity.” Because that is a great window of opportunity for the devil.

Look at Cain. The first murderer, the prototype of all murderers. It all begins with a little bit of jealousy that he allows to fester. God speaks to him. In His grace, He speaks to him. He says, “Sin is crouching at the door, but you must master it.” And Cain doesn’t master it. And that sin which is crouching like a lion actually becomes a lion and causes him to commit murder. James speaks of the anatomy of a murderer also in the first chapter, and it begins in the heart. And so we, too, must deal with the sin that’s there, the anger that’s there. We end up differing very little from these Pharisees who sat there with murder in their heart.

What was their response? After all, they know that He knows what they’re thinking. He’s just unveiled the secrets of their hearts, so how do they respond? Well, they just sat there, stone-faced. They said nothing. They were unwilling to give the correct answer that to do good is allowed and to do evil is forbidden. Because if they had said that, then they would be admitting that they were in error and they would be giving approval for the healing that He was going to do. So they sit there in silence and their silence, we’re told in verse 5, angered the Lord. Not with the anger of injured self concern, but with righteous indignation. He was angry with the anger that a righteous man or a righteous woman has when they see evil.

And what He saw was evil. These religious leaders, these men who would have considered themselves to be the shepherds of God’s sheep, these men were more concerned about their traditions, valued their traditions more highly than this man’s welfare.

So He was angry, but His anger was tempered with grief at the hardness of their hearts. In fact, His grief was really more enduring than His anger. The sense of this statement in verse 5 is, He looked with anger for a moment, but He was continually grieved. Perhaps with a sense of pity for these hardened legalists because really by their hardness of heart they cut themselves off from blessing. They put themselves in slippery places. So I’m sure there was a sense of pity for them in His heart and there must have been a period of uneasy silence as He stared at them and looked at them and searched their hearts.

And then the silence was broken when He spoke, perhaps with a tone of sadness in His voice, and “He said to the man, ‘Stretch out your hand.’ ” Now, that’s an amazing command because that’s just what he couldn’t do. It’s withered. The muscles are atrophied. It’s useless. It’s a dead hand. And yet He’s telling him to stretch it out, to do the impossible. And the man does. He responds immediately and his hand was restored. It was a miracle, a clear miracle, but not only a physical miracle, it’s also an illustration of a spiritual miracle. It illustrates what happens when people come to faith in Christ. By nature, all men, all women are born spiritually dead with spiritual inability as unable to respond in faith to the gospel of our Lord as this man was unable to respond to the command of our Lord. Unable to stretch out his hand in and of himself, we are unable of ourselves to believe.

Now that’s exactly what Paul teaches. Teaches that in Romans 8:6-8. We quoted this a few weeks ago, but I mention it again because it applies very directly to this passage. Paul writes that “the mind set on the flesh is death.” That is, the unregenerate mind, the mind of the unbeliever, is death. Makes that point in Ephesians 2:1-2, are born dead. He goes on to say that this “mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

So we’ve got this dual statement here that underscores the point of inability. Don’t subject themselves to the law of God because they’re not able to do so and not

able to please God. What that means is that men in and of themselves cannot believe the gospel. Now, you say, “Where does Paul say that? He doesn’t say they can’t believe the gospel.” Well, he says that the natural man “cannot please God.” Does faith please God? Of course it pleases God. The author of Hebrews tells us that without faith it is impossible to please God. Faith in the gospel, believing in the gospel pleases God greatly. But of ourself, Paul writes, we cannot please God. So we cannot believe in our own strength. That’s the doctrine of inability. Now that doctrine doesn’t affirm that we can’t believe. It affirms that we can’t believe in our own strength. In God’s strength, we can believe.

The Princeton theologian B. B. Warfield wrote on this subject in an article entitled “Inability and the Demand of Faith.” And there he writes that “while the doctrine of inability denies man any natural strength, this is far from asserting that on making the effort we shall find it impossible to believe. We may believe in God’s strength.” He then cites the case of the man with the withered hand as an example. “The hand,” he writes, “was impotent, but Christ commanded, and he stretched it forth. So God commands what He wills and gives while He commands.” Let me read that again because I think that’s a key statement that he makes. “So God commands what He wills and gives while He commands.”

And in the midst of this, in the midst of the giving of the gospel, a person will feel the sense of urgency about it. It may come to a sense of their sin and may come to a sense of the truth of what’s being said, and they struggle with that. And Warfield goes on to point out that these very struggles of the soul are an evidence of the working of the Holy Spirit within us so that we are justified in saying to every distressed sinner in the words of principal Gore, who was an Anglican of the 19th century, “Act against sin in Christ’s name as if you had strength and you will find you have.” This is really essentially what Peter is saying in that verse that we quoted earlier, 1 Peter 1:23, when he writes that we “have been born again of imperishable seed through the word of God.” As the Word of God of preached, as the evangelist urges those to believe, God gives ability where there is naturally inability so that men do believe because God supplies it. As people respond in faith, they find that they have the faith with which to respond.

So inability rightly understood does not give a person an excuse not to believe, as if to say, “Well, I don’t have the ability. You said it yourself. You say Paul is teaching that. Therefore, I can’t be held accountable, I can’t do it. So that’s where we’ll have to leave it.” Now it doesn’t give one an excuse not to believe. It does give a reason, however, to look to the Lord for help. And we have the assurance that Jesus is a savior to the helpless. That’s why He came. Those are the people that He came to save. He did not come for the healthy. He did not come for the righteous. He came for those who are sick and sinners. And what a great encouragement that is to believe, to look to Him and know that those who look to Him are received by Him, enabled by Him.

Well, because of our Lord’s rejuvenating power, the man was made whole. And by that miracle, the Lord confirmed His earlier claim that He is the Lord of the Sabbath. Earlier, He had demonstrated His authority to forgive sin when He healed the lame man on the Sabbath. And here he confirms His lordship over the sabbath by healing a man on the sabbath day. Well, what was the response of the Pharisees? Were they impressed? Did they lay aside their hostility and join Him? No. They became even more hostile and joined another opposition party.

Verse 6 states that they “went out and immediately *began* taking counsel with the Herodians against Him, *as to* how they might destroy Him.” Now this illustrates just how deep their hatred for Christ was. The Herodians had little interest in Pharisaic principles. They were a secular party of influential Jews whose fortunes were tied to the house of Herod. As friends of Herod, they were friends of Rome. But since the Lord was from Galilee, and therefore a subject of King Herod, these Pharisees thought it important to turn Herod against the Lord in order to achieve their end, their purpose, their goal of destroying Him. And the Herodians, for their part, were interested in maintaining the political status quo, and they could see in Christ’s popularity and these large crowds that are coming to Him, that that status quo was threatened. And so the two entered into an unlikely and what would seem to be an unholy alliance. And yet they were willing to lay aside their differences in order to rid themselves of what they considered a common foe.

The Lord, for His part, knew their intentions. He knew the plot that was being hatched. And so He took His disciples and He “withdrew to the sea.” The

time for the final confrontation between Himself and the religious and political authorities of the land had not yet come. And so He acted in such a way as to diffuse these hostilities. He withdraws to the sea with His disciples down by the seashore, the Sea of Galilee. And the multitudes followed, and they came from all over, from the far south to the far north, all of the regions of Palestine were represented. Great multitudes came, and they came for healing. And they were aggressive. They were so anxious to be healed that they pressed about Him, Mark writes. Literally, they were falling on Him in order to touch Him, and by touching Him be healed.

And so aware of the potential danger of such a crowd that was rather unruly, the Lord instructed His disciples to have a boat ready with which He could escape from the crowd if it got out of hand, or at least move out farther into the sea. It illustrates an important point about our Lord, and that is it illustrates His humanity. As the second person of the Trinity, He could have used His divine power to repulse the crowds without any difficulty. But in His humiliation, in His humanity, He made use of His human wisdom. He took precautions in withdrawing to the sea, away from the Pharisees. He took precautions in regard to the crowds.

It shows that the life of faith does not preclude wisdom and precaution. To trust in God does not mean that we neglect, analyzing our situation, our family situation, our business situation, whatever the situation may be. It doesn't mean that we neglect that or that we neglect preparing for the future or taking precautions. God expects us to do that. He expects us to act in wisdom. And we have an example of that in our Lord. Here He acted wisely in regard to a potentially dangerous crowd that was motivated by self-interest. They were there to be healed. They were there to receive something from Him and their almost frenzied interest in healing indicates that they were principally interested in the Lord as a miracle worker. They were interested in Him in terms of earthly power and material gain.

Nevertheless, in spite of the danger of the crowd, in spite of its selfishness, He graciously healed them. And again, in doing so, He came in conflict with the demonic powers. Whenever those who were possessed saw the Lord, verse 11 states that “they would fall down before Him and cry out saying, ‘You are the Son of God!’” We think, “Well, what a wonderful testimony.” The Son of God. You'd think He'd want to proclaim that and let that spread through the crowds so they'd know

exactly who they’re dealing with. He’s not simply a miracle worker. This is the Son of God that is in their midst. And yet, surprisingly we read, “He earnestly warned them not to reveal His identity.” So He shuts them up.

Now the reason for that is the nation was not yet ready for that revelation. He would give it gradually. He would reveal Himself in His time and in His way. And He would do so by appropriate heralds of the truth, men that He had set apart, not unclean spirits. And in verse 13, He sets those men apart, men who were to be His heralds. With His ministry so widespread, with many sick people coming to Him from all over the land, He chose men to be His helpers, men to carry on His mission into those vast regions. And with His death approaching, He needed to train men who would carry on the mission after His departure.

And so in verse 13, we read that He went up to a mountain somewhere north of the Sea of Galilee, where there are many high hills, and there He summoned 12 men to Himself. Later, during the upper room discourse, He reminded them, “You did not choose me, but I chose you.” And so what we see here – what we see throughout the Scriptures, for that matter, throughout the Old Testament, throughout the New Testament – we see our Lord taking the initiative with men. He chose them and He chose those whom He wanted. These are the men that He selected for Himself out of His own choosing, according to His own sovereign good pleasure. And that is the way it always is. If you’ve been chosen by God, it’s because He wanted you. He chose you. And if you’ve been chosen by Him, it’s because He chose you first.

And we see that here. He chooses these men according to His sovereign good pleasure. And the purpose of their calling is given in verses 14 and 15. It’s threefold. First, that “they might be with Him,” that they might have a relationship with Him, that they might enter into close fellowship with Him because that’s where service for the Lord and for others begins. Fundamental to serving the Lord, fundamental to serving in a church or serving Christians in any way is knowing the Lord and having a relationship with Him. And so through His association with them, by living together, traveling together, eating together, talking together, they would get to know Him better. Their relationship with Him would develop. They would

learn more about His identity, about His purpose, about His goal. They would be trained by Him.

They would learn from Him and in so doing, be equipped for the ministry so that, secondly, He might send them out to preach. They were to be His heralds, and we see here a principle that those who receive from the Lord must then impart what they received to others. But before they can do that, they must receive from the Lord and they must grow in that knowledge in that relationship with the Lord. And the essence, I think, of what they were to share with others was exactly that which the Lord had been preaching, a gospel of God. And as they knew Him and as revelation progressed, they would have a clear understanding of that and preach it more clearly and in more detail. Really, the whole of the New Testament, the whole of the Scriptures, for that matter, is the gospel of God. And they would be charged with the responsibility of bringing that to others.

Thirdly, He gave them authority to cast out demons, supernatural ability. And perhaps that signified that Satan’s domain was being destroyed because the King, the true king, had come.

The 12 whom He called to Himself are listed in verses 16 through 19. We’re familiar with most of the names, not terribly familiar with all of them, though, so we’ll touch on each one of them, say a bit about them, and then conclude the lesson with some summary statements that brings all of this together.

The first name that’s listed is “Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter) – ” which means “rock.” Now as we trace Peter’s life through the gospels, he hardly seems to be a rock. He was impetuous. He was unreliable. He was fickle. But giving him this name, the Lord was expressing not what he was, but what he would become, indicating the change that He would produce in him, and so it was a name that really expresses the Lord’s love for Peter. That in spite of his future failures – and he becomes famous for those or notorious for those – but in spite of all of that, the Lord would be patient with him, the Lord would develop him, the Lord would be constant with Peter and change him, and that’s what he’s a reminder to us of, the transforming grace of our Lord, which applies as much to you and to me as it did to Peter. He’s a great example for us of what God does in the lives of His people.

Well, the next two are James and John. They were brothers. The Lord called them “Boanerges” because, well, it means “Sons of Thunder” and He called them that because of their fiery disposition, or so it would seem. There’s good evidence that that’s the reason. If you remember that event in Luke chapter 9, they passed through a village of the Samaritans and they’re not received hospitably by them. These Samaritans are unresponsive to the Lord and so the two disciples, these two brothers, knew exactly how to handle that. Let’s just call down fire from heaven on them. And that’s what they wanted to do, and the Lord wouldn’t approve that. But it earned them the name Boanerges, Sons of Thunder.

James was the first martyr of the 12 apostles, and he was killed by Herod Agrippa. It’s recorded in Acts chapter 12. He was, as William Hendrickson writes, the first to arrive in heaven while his brother John, in all probability, was the last to remain on earth. John was, as is recorded in John 13, “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” He’s the author of the gospel of John, the epistles of John, the book of Revelation, well known to us by his life, particularly by his writings.

Andrew is next. Less familiar to us, but he was Peter’s brother, also a fisherman. Then Philip, who was a fellow townsman of Andrew and Peter, all from the city of Bethsaida. He was the one in John chapter 1 who brought Nathaniel to the Lord. Bartholomew is the next and Bartholomew is probably Nathaniel, both names referring to the same person. And the reason for saying that is both the name Bartholomew and the name Nathaniel occur in connection with the name Philip, the one who brought Nathaniel to the Lord. And if you remember, when he was brought to the Lord in John 1, the Lord called him “an Israelite in whom there is no guile,” in whom there is no deceit.

Matthew, the next listed, is Levi the tax collector. Then there’s Thomas, doubting Thomas, whose doubts were turned to faith following the resurrection, a faith that was given expression in the greatest confession of all, “My Lord and my God.”

Then James is listed, “the son of Alphaeus.” So we’ve got two Jameses listed in this list of the 12 disciples. And there are three prominent men by that name in the New Testament. These two apostles, and then James, the half brother of our Lord, who is the author of that epistle by his name, the man who became a leader of the



church in Jerusalem. And then there's a fourth James whose name is listed in Luke chapter 6 and in Acts chapter 1. He's the brother of Thaddaeus, who is the next disciple and apostle listed here, who is probably to be identified with Judas, not Iscariot, found in John 14:22.

Then there's Simon the Cananaean. That means Simon the Zealot. That's how Luke identifies him when he gives his list of disciples and apostles. His name probably indicates that he had formerly belonged to a party of the zealots, which opposed foreign rule in Palestine which tried to foment revolution, had connected with it assassins. That's what he came out of, a man who tried to start revolution with the Romans.

And then finally Mark lists Judas Iscariot with the simple description, “who also betrayed Him.”

These are the 12 men that our Lord called to Himself and commissioned in His service, men who He would send out to represent Him with His message of hope and salvation. Not a particularly impressive group of men: four were fishermen, one a hated tax collector, one a political extremist, one a traitor. Of six of them we know almost nothing. They were not trained in the ministry. They did not graduate from a university that day. They were not trained preachers. And yet these are the men that Christ wanted, the men whom He chose.

It was about the year AD 30. Tiberius Caesar was on the throne. The whole world of that day knew who Caesar was, but few outside of this circle and outside of the region of Galilee knew who Peter was. And yet today, who can name the first 12 Caesars? And yet multitudes throughout the world and for generations have been able to name the 12 apostles. These insignificant men became the foundation of the church. With them, Christ formed a spiritual community that transcends race, sex, age, social class, an international community that has outlived the Roman empire, outlived many empires, and will endure forever. Not because of the greatness of these men, but the greatness of God's grace and His power. The apostles deserve our respect. They deserve our admiration. They're men that we should study and look at their lives and see where we can emulate them. They're great men, but the success of the church was not due to them. It was due to God's power, to God's grace. As

our Lord said in Matthew 16, “I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Now that should be a great encouragement to us. Christ has summoned us to do His work and He has done that because He wanted us to be His. If He’s called you to Himself, it’s because He wanted you. He knew what He was doing when He called you in all of your weakness and all of your inability. But having called you to do His work, to do His service, He has not called you to stand alone. He is with us at all times and through us He is doing His supernatural work of building the church. And yet, as He did with these disciples, He can make you, He can make me and all of our weakness effective, productive servants for Him. You may feel that the service that you’re doing is small and it’s insignificant, but if it is the work of the Lord, if you’re following His will in what you’re doing, it isn’t insignificant. God is greatly pleased by small acts of mercy. It’s service that has eternal value and as we grow in our relationship with Him and live in obedience to Him, our work increases. Our responsibilities increase. Our influence grows, and it grows with eternal reward.

But foundational to serving the Lord, foundational to our work for the Lord is our walk with the Lord, and that is what we should seek. As Christians, we should make it our prayer and our effort that we grow in that relationship with Him. May the Lord help us to do that. May the Lord help each of us to grow in our relationship with our Lord, our knowledge of Him, our walk with Him.

But as we close, may I ask you, do you know Him as your savior? Do you have a personal relationship with Him? If not, you can. It’s very simple. It’s not through going through all kinds of acts of ritual. By simply believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, trusting in His death on the cross as the full and final payment of sin. He has finished the work. He declared it triumphantly from the cross. It is finished. Nothing more we can do. Nothing we can add, but simply receive what He has accomplished and He offers in the gospel. And if you sense in your heart a struggle with that, you sense the truth of it, if you sense the need of it, don’t resist that and don’t think, “Well, I’m unable.” Believe in the Lord. Trust in Him. And in the act of doing that, you’ll find that you have the faith that God supplies. May the Lord help you to do that. Shall we stand now for the benediction?

Heavenly Father, we do thank You for the grace that's ours in Christ, that through His work He purchased everything, He did finish all of the work of salvation on the cross. He obtained life for us. He obtained an eternal inheritance for us. He obtained for us the most fundamental foundational of all things. He obtained faith for us and obedience. We pray, Father, that You would continue to bless us who have believed with that because faith still comes from You. It is always Your gift. Help us to be obedient servants, to serve You faithfully.

And if there be any in attendance who do not know Christ as Savior, give them no rest or peace until they come to know Him. Trouble their hearts and give them the knowledge that in turning to Christ they turn to a Savior who came not to help those who can help themselves, but to help the helpless, to help the sick, to help the needy, to raise the spiritually dead. We pray these things in our Savior's name, Amen.