

### **Mark 3:13-19 Calling the Twelve**

#### **<sup>13</sup>And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted,**

In our verses today, Jesus has left the crowds that had pursued him to ascend “the mountain” where he appointed twelve men to be his disciples. Many significant moments take place on mountains. Over and over in the Old Testament, we see that mountains are places of revelation, and of course we’re going to see that later in the New Testament at the Mountain of Transfiguration, and of course at Golgotha.

When it says that Jesus summoned those whom He Himself desired, it’s a statement of election to apostleship. Jesus “called to him those he wanted.”--He summoned those whom he willed. Jesus determines the call. Disciples do not decide to follow Jesus and do him a favor. These men have nothing in common except his sovereign call, apart from which the community of disciples cannot exist. The embryo of the church is already signified in the call of apprentice followers?? to form a new community around Jesus.

Along with Jesus’ Sonship, and His Authority, the theme of Following Jesus is one of the most important one in the Gospel of Mark. From the beginning of his Galilean ministry Jesus calls people to fellowship with himself in order to teach them His message, and tell them about His mission, so that they can also share this with others. The word for “disciple,” in both its Greek and Hebrew roots, means “student” or “learner,” specifically one who learns in active fellowship, and so it’s similar to what we would call an apprentice. There are a lot of people following Jesus around, but many just come out to see Him for a day or two. In choosing the Twelve, Jesus is appointing them from a larger group of unnamed followers to be apostles, His ambassadors to the world.

#### **and they came to Him**

Finally, the apostles come “to him.” Rabbis did not call disciples, but were chosen by their disciples, much as students today choose a college. Nor would a rabbi dare leave the impression that his person superseded the Torah. Rabbinic disciples would ideally see in their tutor a means of mastering the Torah and a model of what they themselves might become. But Jesus’ program is different. Jesus is the sole and exclusive subject of the call. Nothing—not even the Torah—is presented as more important than Jesus. Unlike a rabbi, Jesus is not a means to an ulterior good but is Himself the final Good. As for equaling or surpassing Jesus, that possibility does not exist. The question is what Jesus can make of his disciples, not what they can be on their own.

#### **<sup>14</sup>And He appointed twelve,**

The additional statement that “he appointed twelve” expresses officially the summons and prepares for the qualifications which follow. “He appointed twelve”. This use of the verb *epoiēsen* means to make someone something,—king or priest, for instance. Here, though, their appointment is expressed not as an office, but as the purpose of the appointment. To appoint is to select from an existing lot and raise to a new status, but to make means to bring into existence. Discipleship does not consist in what disciples can do for Christ, but in what Christ can make of disciples. The new status of the disciples is signified by their being named—designated as “apostles.”

#### **so that they would be with Him**

Being with Jesus and learning from Him is what qualified the Twelve to bear witness to him and to participate in his distinctive ministry of proclamation of the Kingdom of God, and the overthrowing of demonic power. In every respect the new community is Jesus’ doing.

The calling of the Twelve underscores the authority of Jesus to determine who will be His followers. The Twelve are constituted to be with him, and to be sent; the latter purpose divides into two further responsibilities: to preach and to have authority over demons. Apostleship is thus a matter of being with Jesus, and being sent by Jesus,--so they are in relationship with Jesus and are sent by Jesus, a result of that relationship. It’s significant that they were “to be with him”. Discipleship is to be in relationship with Jesus. It is relationship before it is ministry, a “who” before a “what.”—

it's truly "Who You Know", not "What You Know"! From now on His person and His work determine the existence of the Twelve.

**and that He *could* send them out to preach,<sup>15</sup> and to have authority to cast out the demons.**

The second purpose of the call is to be "sent." In Greek the verbal form of the word for "apostle" (apostolos) is apostellein, meaning "to commission" or "send with a specific purpose." The Twelve are sent by Jesus specifically "to preach" and "to have authority to drive out demons." The Greek word rendered "preach" (kēryssein) is the same word used of Jesus' proclamation of the gospel of God. In addition to verbalizing the message, apostles are empowered to act with authority to expel demons. This constitutes the second reason for their sending. Until now the power of proclamation and exorcism has been the sole possession of Jesus, who **has "traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons"** (Mark 1:39). In an intentional act of empowerment, Jesus confers on the Twelve *his* authority to proclaim the good news and prevail over demonic powers. Discipleship is a matter of being *with* Jesus, of *speaking* his message, and of *acting* in his name by casting out demons and opposing evil. The promise given to the Twelve is that they will share in the power of the Kingdom of God which breaks through to men in power and authority with the coming of Jesus.

**<sup>16</sup> And He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder");<sup>18</sup> and Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, and Simon the Zealot;<sup>19</sup> and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.**

The various lists of the 12 disciples are interesting, in that sometimes disciples are included, as well as a commentary on them, and sometimes not. Sometimes the twelve are listed by nick-names, like "Peter", or designators to differentiate them from others, like "Simon the Zealot", or alternative names. But, it's always the same 12 that we're talking about. Mark's list is headed by Simon whose call to discipleship occurred early in the Galilean ministry (Mark 1:16). Because he is designated by his Semitic name Simon, usually, this is Mark's reminder that he was also called Peter—which is good, because that's how Luke was going to later refer to Him in his gospel, and then again in the book of Acts, where Peter is going to play such a prominent early role as the spokesperson of the Apostles after Jesus has ascended. What's important is that Jesus is the one who surnamed him Peter. The new name is the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic Cephas, which signifies "a stone" or "a rock." It's a nick-name.

The introduction of the two sons of Zebedee next is appropriate to the importance which they assume in the subsequent narrative, where Peter, James and John constitute a privileged group within the Twelve. They are given the surname "Boanerges," which is interpreted to mean "sons of thunder."—likely due to their tendency to the fiery outbursts which are attributed to the two brothers later. Although Simon and Andrew began service together (Mark 1:16), both here and in Ch. 13:3 Andrew is listed after James and John. They all were those who had followed Jesus from the beginning of the Galilean ministry.

"Philip" is an old Greek-Macedonian name, after King Philip, the father of Alexander the Great.

"Bartholomew" is not a proper name but means "Son of Talmi."<sup>63</sup> Presumably this disciple had a personal name as well—although it's not listed. "Matthew" is a common Semitic name, and of course we read about his call back in Mark 2:14. "Thomas" is an Aramaic name meaning "twin."

"James the son of Alphaeus" is unknown apart from the apostolic lists. If he is the brother of Levi, who is designated "the son of Alphaeus" in Ch. 2:14, there were three pairs of brothers among the Twelve.—but Alphaeus is a common name so, who knows. "Thaddeus' " standing among the Twelve is confirmed by both canonical and non-canonical sources, but in Luke-Acts his place is taken by "Judas, the son of James."—this was probably an alternate name for him—after Iscariot messed up the name Judas, I don't blame him for preferring to be called Thaddeus from then on.

Simon the Zealot was likely part of the zealots, who tried to overthrow Rome. And, always last in the lists of disciples is Judas Iscariot. The surname "Iscariot" identifies him as "the man from the village of Karioth." The stigma of betrayal of the Lord is attached to his name forever.