



## BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Mark 3:14-19

“The Messiah’s Year of Public Favor, Part III”

TRANSCRIPT

We’re turning again to the theme of the New Testament Revelation of the Messiah. And today is the third of our series of studies in Messiah’s Year of Public Favor. “Jesus never wrote on paper,” William Barclay has said. “He left no printed book, instead he wrote his message upon men and these men were the apostles.” That profound statement is true. The Lord Jesus so trained his men that they deeply and significantly had his image stamped upon them.

There is little doubt that that ministry of our Lord, the Messiah, was one of his most important tasks during the days of his flesh, the time of his incarnation. His public ministry comprised roughly three years and they may be divided into three periods called the Year of Obscurity, the Year of Public Favor, and the Year of Opposition. We have divided our consideration of the second year into three sections and this study is the third and final one. Most of the second year of ministry took place in Galilee, the most northerly of the four provinces of the land of Palestine which contained such well-known places as Capernaum, Bethsaida, Nazareth, Nain, as well as the Sea of Galilee. Many of the most familiar of the gospel events took place in this area. In fact, many by the side of or on the lake, the Sea of Galilee.

The second year was spent largely in the performance of miraculous signs, in teaching, and in the gathering of the apostles into a group of disciples following him closely. We’ve considered his miracles which identified him as the promised Messiah according to Old Testament prophecy and his teaching also related to an explanation of the different aspects of his messianic ministry. In this final study of the second year, the Year of Public Favor, we’re going to look at the gathering together of the apostles. Very few things that Jesus did have turned out to be more important than the development of this body of men into devoted followers who literally changed their world and are still changing men and women today. Upon considering the body of men chosen by the Lord, one is immediately struck by the age of the men. It can be said without any dispute that Christianity began as a youth movement. Christian art and preaching have sometimes obscured the fact, but most of the apostles were in their twenties when they became his disciples.

In fact, it’s generally thought that the Apostle John was still in his teens. Writing a generation later, the Apostle Paul mentions that of the five hundred to whom the risen Christ appeared the greater part remain unto this present. The implication is that the Messiah’s followers were primarily among the younger generation. Even the words that he used to speak to them confirmed this, for he used such terms as “little children” and “lads” of them. Isaac once made the point too, for the original version of his great hymn, “When I survey the wondrous cross read this way, when I survey the wondrous cross where the young prince of glory died.” Stuart’s words are true and no one has ever understood the heart of youth and all its gaiety and gallantry and generosity and hope, its sudden loneliness and haunting dreams and hidden conflicts and strong temptations, no one has understood it nearly so well as Jesus. And no one ever realized more clearly than Jesus did that the adolescent years of life when strange dormant thoughts are stirring and the whole world begins to unfold a God’s best chance with the soul. When Jesus and youth come together, deep calls to deep. There is an immediate, instinctive feeling of

kinship and everything that is fine and noble and pure in youth bows down in admiration and devotion before him.

But let us turn now to the gathering of the apostolate and we shall begin with the manner of their calling and philosophically considered in the beginning. It might seem strange to men and women of the 20th Century that Jesus the Messiah had nothing very obvious to leave to the world as his monument. He had written no books as we mentioned, he had founded no schools nor had he built a hospital. What he left was simply a band of ordinary men in whom he had invested the larger part of his energies, together with a larger group of followers from both sexes.

In the interval between his resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of God, the Lord gave himself almost completely to the apostles. They were his great hope for the influencing of the world. An interesting fact should not go unnoticed, in Judaism the custom of the times was for individuals to seek out a rabbi from who the individual wished instruction. Since Galileans were among the Baptist’s disciples and there is no indication that John went to Galilee to seek them out, this procedure may have been followed by him. In our Lord’s case, however, he took the initiative. He selected and called each of his men personally. He did not bind them to himself because of a particular philosophical view of things although they had been brought to the saving knowledge of him. The tie was personal as well as doctrinal.

Essentially they were bound to him as they understood him. That is, as God’s divine Son, the Messiah of Israel. Now historically consider, it seems clear from the gospels that the apostles’ call came in several stages. At the first they became acquainted with the Lord, several evidently having been John’s disciples, and began to have fellowship with him frequently, although they remained in their various secular occupations.

The second stage came when they broke their ties with their homes and leaving their secular ties behind them became regular members of the larger body of his

followers. And finally, there came the day when they were separated from the larger body and called by our Lord to the closest of companionship with him. What a privilege was theirs.

From the beginning it’s clear that they were not self-made men. They were the product of his creative activity. As he put it once, follow me and I will make you become fishers of men. They would have remained simply Galilean fishermen had not Jesus called them, that’s the wonder of the matter. Not that such simple men transform the world, but that Jesus of Nazareth made them world conquerors. The comments of one commentator regarding their call are these, it was really a three-fold call: first the call to friendship, then the call to following, and finally the call to the full ministry of apostleship. That third stage came after a night of prayer as Luke 6, and verse 12 makes plain. Which probably is meant to communicate to us the seriousness and solemnity of the call to the apostolate. There in the mountainous region of his all night vigil he called twelve men to himself including Judas the traitor. Mark 3, verse 14 through 19 sets the scene. The decisive step took place after the consultation with God, the father. We may be sure that no mistake was made even in the call of Judas. The soundness of the appointments became evident later in the products of their lives. And Jesus later on expresses his own personal appreciation for the faithfulness of the apostles to him in Luke chapter 22, verse 28 and 29.

Let’s look secondly at the men who were called to become apostles and let me first point out some of the similarities among them. In the light of the feminism of our day, the first question one might ask is, why did our Lord appoint only men to the task? To say that he did so for cultural reasons, namely that women apostles would have had no acceptance by that culture, is a gratuitous assumption. Our Lord does not accommodate truth to human culture that rests under sin. The Lord does not explicitly state his reasons but the likeliest reason is that God has committed the responsibility of the ministry of the word of God among men and women to spirit appointed men. This

tradition, the apostles have handed down to the church as well as Paul’s words on the point in 1 Timothy 2, verse 8 through verse 15 make plain.

The question is not one of equality versus any quality, for women possess equality with men as all of us know. But simply a matter of divinely ordained function. Susan Foh, a godly and gifted woman teacher, has put it this way, “The choice of an all male apostolate is the result or expression of the principle in 1 Timothy 2, verse 12 through verse 14, of the subordination which merely means ordering under of the woman in the church. We know that the choice of men as apostles is significant because of 1 Timothy 2, verse 12 through verse 14. To have chosen a woman as an apostle would have contradicted the principle of the woman’s subordination in the church, 1 Corinthians 14, verse 34. Scriptural principles tell us how to interpret biblical examples, not the reverse,” Mrs. Foh says in a very interesting book on this particular topic. It’s entitled, incidentally, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism*.

There are, as one might expect, similarities and diversities among the apostles. For example, among the similarities is the fact that all but one of them, Judas being the exception, were Galileans. This is undoubtedly one of the reasons that our Lord and his men were viewed with suspicion, particularly in the south. It was also, perhaps, one of the reasons that he chose them, because Galilee’s greater contacts with the gentiles due to its geographical position helped to fit them better for ministry to all men, which later became their responsibility.

Most of the men were chosen from the ordism class, skilled and resourceful and practical men. These ordinary men became great, although they had little formal education because of the greatness of their theme, the Lord himself. Their diversity; the diversity of the group is best seen in the fact that Simon the zealot, a fiery nationalist who believed among other things that Israel shall not pay tribute to a foreign pagan emperor, could live and walk together with Matthew the tax gatherer and publican. How could two such be so closely united except in Christ?

The diversity of the men and the apostolate may be seen in the energetic and impetuous Peter. In thoughtful, almost mystical, meditative and prayerful John. And Andrew, the man of bold and untroubled believing response to Christ. In Thomas, who had as someone has said, a constitutional melancholy haunting him. And in committed James, the first martyr of the apostolate.

We look now at the identity of some of them a little more closely. In the Markan text of Mark 3:14 through 19, one finds the name of the twelve apostles and it’s not necessary to read the list again, I suggest you turn there right now and have it before you because we’re going to look at verse 14 in just a moment, concerning the motive that our Lord had in calling them. It’s not possible to go over these names thoroughly, describing their leading traits of character, but perhaps a word or two regarding some of the more striking of them would help.

I’ll begin with Andrew whose name means brave or manly. The name describes him well. Andrew is the patron saint of Scotland, the brother of Peter, and evidently a man of easy friendliness. He was one of the two disciples who heard the Baptist point out Christ as the Lamb of God and who accepted Jesus’ invitation to come see where he dwelt. Out of that meeting came Andrew the saint, and apostle to be, forever after that personal encounter, Christ’s man completely. He was an evangelist at heart and is always seen in the middle of activity and of the introducing of others to Jesus Christ. He’s the patron saint of all seekers after the souls of men.

Peter was the leader of the apostles, called historically Primus Inter Pares, or First Among Equals. His story is too long to tell, the greatness of the man is seen in his marvelous confession of Christ at Caesarea Philippi where he said to him, in response to our Lord, “Thou art the Christ, a Son of the living God.” And the human deficiencies in character are pathetically displayed in his subsequent denial of Christ at the jibe of a scoffing, young maid. The rock, as he was described by Christ, redeemed himself, however, by his repentant sorrow over his denial. The knowledge of Jesus’ acceptance in

spite of his denial may have been the thing that made this man of shifting sand into the rock he was supposed to be. Jesus gave to Peter the great commission, “Feed my sheep,” John 21:17.

Matthew, the publicanus, or the tax gatherer, must have been branded a traitor and hated by many from whom he accepted taxes for Rome. In fact, one might wonder if Jesus should have chosen him, for his presence among the apostles would be a stumbling block to many Jewish people, particularly in the south. Jesus, however, made no mistake. This man too became Christ’s man through and through and advertised the fact. After his conversion he made a feast for all his friends. A very strange and unusual group they must have been and with Jesus as the guest of honor. Stewart suggests he had three motives in doing this. It was to celebrate his spiritual birthday, it was to provide an opportunity for an open confession of his new allegiance. A confession which would mean committing himself publicly and irrevocably to Jesus and burning his boats behind him. That there could be no going back to the old life. And it was to give friends a chance of meeting Jesus and sharing his own wonderful experience.

The name Friends of Publicans and Sinners was first flung at Christ as a jibe, but it’s his crowing glory now. I’d loved to have been at that feast in Matthew’s house and hear this man speak about the sovereign grace that he had come to know and had been delivered from his sins and how he invited others to come to Christ and enjoy him also. A word about Thomas, called Doubting Thomas or Thomas the Agnostic, or even Thomas the Skeptic by many. He is misnamed. When Jesus had decided to go to Jerusalem and others were seeking to dissuade him loudly, claiming it was folly, it was Thomas who spoke up bravely, “Let us also go,” he said, “that we may die with him,” John 11:16. He had his questions, it’s true, but they were not those of rebellious unbelief, rather they were just the penalty of his temperament, someone has said, in which a touch of melancholy was mingled.

Thomas was really one of those men who always keep well within the limits of their knowledge. While he has been called loyal but dull, it’s probably better to see him as someone who just liked the feel of solid facts under his feet. He was like some of my students in theological seminary who, after an exam in which they are rather sure of an A grade, say to their fellow students, “I hope I passed.” We should always remember that there came a time in Thomas’s life when he swept the midnight from his soul, fighting his way through the clouds of doubt, and blurted out from his innermost spirit the highest expression of faith found in the New Testament, “My Lord, and my God,” John 20:28.

Why did Jesus call the apostles? We look now at the purpose of his calling. Mark expresses it this way in Mark 3:14, “And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach.” It’s clear from this that communion with Christ was the first reason for the call of the disciples. Mark’s statement is the clue to the purpose. He ordained twelve that they should be with him. That he might be with them states it well. It was not so much that he needed companionship as that they needed the incomparable privilege and benefit of daily communion with him. It’s still true today that personal intimacy or spiritual communion with Christ is the best of teachers. And it’s by this that Christ leaves the stamp of his own image upon us. But more than communion with him was involved. Ministry for Christ was involved as well. For Mark says, “And that he might send them forth to preach.”

This was the second purpose of their call. The very title “apostle” stresses this, for the word means, of course, one who is sent forth. The demands of superior success are great in almost any calling. Dennis Conner, the skipper of Stars & Stripes in the popular recent regatta of the America’s cup in Australia, once said this about qualifications for sailing with him, “If a crewman will put this ahead of religion, family, girlfriend, home, and career, then I’ll give him a tryout.” The theology of the statement, of course, is awful but the sentiment of the need for committal is striking. Jesus gave the biblical and orthodox parallel for becoming his disciple as, “If any man come to me and hate not his

father and mother and wife and children and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that foresaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” Those texts come from Luke chapter 14, verse 26 and 27, and verse 33. To sum it up, according to the Lord Jesus, one must hate his family, bear his own cross, and forsake his possessions to become our Lord’s disciple. That’s not easy. And even the apostles had difficulty with it. And if they had known what bearing the cross might ultimately mean for them, for it meant for many of them their death, they may have had even more difficulty. Stunned by his words, however. They did not desert and that’s the emblem of apostleship. The terrifying realism of Calvary ultimately fitted them for the greatness that would become theirs.

The third thing for which Jesus chose the men was the apostolate itself. We began the study by noting that Jesus did not write anything on paper and left no printed book. He rather wrote his message on men and they were the apostles. This is, as James Stalker points out one of the chief monuments of the incomparable originality of Jesus, “He sewed in their minds the seeds of the truth found in his, and he stamped the image of his character on them, and sent them forth to worldwide and eternal fame. They stand like a row of noble pillars, towering far across the flats of time, but the sunlight that shines on them and makes them visible comes entirely from him. He gave them all their greatness and theirs is one of the most striking evidences of his.” As Stalker again writes, “He made them the instruments for the guidance for the church, promising them that the Holy Spirit would come and guide them and all the sphere of the truth and show them things to come, thereby validating the New Testament writings. In effect, he lived his life after his ascension in the lives of these chosen men. And through the Scriptures he has continued to live his life through the church, called beautifully and truly the body of Christ,” Ephesians 1:23 and Colossians 1:18 and 24, so today the ministry of the Spirit of Christ through the apostles.

The words written by the apostles have become and are the rule, the norm, the cannon, by which the church is regulated. Little did the simple, ordinary men from the ruined tabernacle of David realize that when their lives were touched by the life of Jesus of Nazareth, they nor the world would ever be the same again. The Holy Spirit speaking in the Scriptures through the mouths of the prophets and apostles, these simple men is the guide to life for all time. The message proclaimed by one of Christ’s men, one of the apostles, is simply this, “To him give all the prophets witness that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins,” Acts 10:43. And let all that wish to follow in the steps of his men do just that, believe in him.

If you’ve heard my words and you’ve heard how the Lord trained the apostles to preach the word and you’ve heard this message, “To him give all the prophets witness that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins,” the message is not really finished until you have given your heart by God’s grace to the Lord Jesus Christ. Recognizing the fact that you, too, as they, have sinned and come short of the glory of God and constantly do that and therefore stand under divine judgment and guilt, recognizing that the Lord Jesus has offered the atoning sacrifice by which sinners may be saved, paying the penalty of sinners and recognizing the fact that you need him. Come to him, trust him, in your heart give him thanks for dying for sinners. Acknowledge that you’re a sinner and receive him as your own personal savior through trust. May the Lord cause you to do that right at this moment.

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