

A Ragtag Band of Misfits

Mark 3:13-19

Introduction

We are continuing our study in the Gospel of Mark today. We will begin, however, by reading in the Gospel of John. Please turn in your Bible to John 17:12-23.

While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me; and I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

But now I come to You; and these things I speak in the world so that they may have My joy made full in themselves.

I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one.

They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.

As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word;

that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they

also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one;

I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

According to the standards of this world system, Jesus Christ was, I am sure, considered one of the greatest failures that ever lived. In fact, in Mark, chapter 3, where I want to draw your attention today, He is about to perform His greatest blunder.

Anyone would know that if you are going to propagate a cause, you need to select individuals to help who are on top of things; who are as sharp as the person introducing the cause. You need to choose men and women who are going to be able to take the cause and carry it through and who are most likely to succeed. Yet, Jesus Christ does the exact opposite!

I read a fictitious memo from "The Jordan Management Consultants". Let me share it with you.

Thank you for submitting the resumés of the twelve men you have selected for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests and we have run the results through our computer. It is our staff's opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of work you are undertaking.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to an offensive temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. Brothers James and John, sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Frankly, they're "Mama's boys". Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by our greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau. James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus have definite leanings toward the radical and register high on the manic depressive scale.

One of the candidates does, however, show great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness. He has a keen business mind. He's highly motivated, as well as ambitious and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man.

According to the standards that the world would impose, I would imagine this would not be too far from the truth in its suggestions.

Jesus Christ is revolutionary. He is radically different. So we find Him, in Mark, chapter 3, choosing different kinds of men as His disciples.

The Process of Choosing the Disciples

Let us look at three elements in Jesus' process of choosing disciples.

1. First, Jesus' choosing of the disciples was personal.

Look at Mark 3:13 and notice the personal call Jesus gives.

And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him.

The Greek word for "summoned," or "called" as your translation may read, is "proskaleo," which is a very intense word. It means, "to call face to face".

This is a calling to one side. In other words, "I want you to come after Me and learn of Me."

This is intimate. This is not casual. This is much more than a conversation over a cup of coffee and a batch of cookies. This is a very intimate, one-on-one personal calling.

2. Secondly, Jesus' calling of the disciples was also prayerful.

Luke tells us, in Luke 6:12-13, that Jesus Christ spent the night praying before He called His disciples. He spent an entire night seeking the will of His Father before He ever went about choosing these twelve men. So this calling was personal and prayerful.

3. Thirdly, Jesus' calling of the disciples was purposeful.

Look at Mark 3:14.

And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach,

Notice the disciples were:

- to be with Jesus;
- to be sent out to preach.

The disciples were first, to be with Him. A "disciple," as you may know, is translated from the Greek word "mathetes," which means "learner". You are a learner, if you are a disciple.

Later in the gospel, they will become "apostles," or "apostolos" in the Greek. That is the word that means, "sent ones".

At first, they are the ones learning. Later, they will be the ones sent.

So the process of discipleship was one filled with purpose. Jesus Christ wanted to inculcate into their characters, His character. He wanted to teach them all that He knew, so that when He sent them out, they would be capable of propagating His cause. They were not only to be with Him, they were to be representatives of Him.

The Background of the Chosen Twelve

Now, for the benefit of our understanding, let us look into the background of these chosen twelve disciples. As a description of this group of men, I have entitled our discussion today, "A Ragtag Band of Misfits". The more we study and learn about these particular men, the more we will find that it is almost shocking that they could be blended and molded together to form a group of men who could even get along.

Let me give some facts about the list of disciples that we are given in Scripture. There are four lists of the apostles in: Matthew 10, Mark 3, Luke 6, and

Acts 1. All of the lists contain some interesting similarities.

1. First, in every list of the apostles, Peter is mentioned first and Judas is mentioned last.

We cannot determine a whole lot from this fact, but it seems that Peter was first, or as the Greek word for first, “protos,” means, he was “first in rank”. This did not mean that Peter was first in character or quality. This did not mean that he was, of all of them, the most likely to succeed – in fact, the opposite was true. However, he seemed to have the “protos”; he seemed to gain rank. He was probably the leader of the twelve, as they moved through their three years and some months with Jesus Christ.

2. Secondly, each list has three groups of disciples with four members in each.

Every time these lists occur in the Bible, there are three groups of disciples and there are the same four members in each group. They include:

- the first group: Peter, Andrew, James, and John;
- the second group: Philip, Bartholomew (or Nathanael, as he is sometimes called), Thomas, and Matthew;
- the third group: James, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot (not Simon Peter), and Judas Iscariot.

In each group, the amount of information given about the men decreases. So the first group, which is always Peter, Andrew, James and John, has the most information given about the men. We therefore, know the most about them. In fact, they will also write the most about Jesus Christ.

I do not know how the groupings happened, but in any group, even in our own church congregation, there are people who kind of clump together and form a group. This band of men formed groups as well – always with four men in each of the three groups.

3. Thirdly, understand that with each group of disciples, not only is there less information about them, but they also are less intimate with Jesus Christ.

In other words, the first group of four disciples was very close to the Lord. The second group spent some time with Him. The third group, as far as we know, had little personal contact with Him. Jesus, of course, taught and had contact with all of the disciples around the campfire and as they walked along.

However, each group had a decreasing amount of intimacy with Jesus.

Before we go any further, let me mention that this brings up a very important point about leadership. It is impossible for a leader to be intimate with everyone who follows, even if it is only twelve men. I went to a school (my undergraduate school, not my graduate school), which taught that a pastor should not be intimate or close with anyone, because you cannot be close with everyone. I was taught not to have personal friends because other people might get upset. Fortunately, I have thrown that out the window and I develop personal friends, just as you develop personal friends. However, it is impossible to be personally involved, as a leader, in the life of every individual who follows.

It is fascinating that each of these groups seemed to have a leader. It is likely that the leaders were more intimate with Christ than the other individuals involved in that group. Peter, for instance, was probably the closest, of all of the disciples, to Jesus Christ. He was perhaps, second only to John. I think that was probably because Peter was always on the back of Jesus Christ – Jesus could never get rid of him. Peter was always there asking questions and plaguing Him. So Peter was probably the closest one of them all to Jesus Christ.

4. Fourthly, among these disciples, there are extreme differences.

When I say that there are extreme differences among these men, I mean *extreme* differences. Let me give three examples.

- Peter and John have tremendous emotional differences.

Peter is impetuous. Peter is quick. Peter is fast. He is always on the go.

John, on the other hand, is meditative and slow.

I can just see Peter pulling John, “Come on, man, let’s go.”

Then, I can hear John saying, “Well, I’m meditating right now, on the things that Jesus said last week.”

They had tremendous emotional differences.

- There are also tremendous spiritual differences in Nathanael and Thomas.

Nathanael believed everything. Every occurrence we have of him in the scriptures, he is believing something. God said it, so that does it; that settles it.

Thomas had to have the scientific method before he would believe anything. I can hear him saying, "I've got to see it; I've got to touch it, before I'll ever believe it."

They had tremendous differences in their spiritual natures.

Is that not true in our church, as well? Some are so full of faith and would believe anything. We are raising money for a building fund and people are already determining the color of the carpet. They know exactly what is going to happen. They are ready to go. Others are slow, cautious, thoughtful.

- The third example is that there are political differences between Matthew and Simon the Zealot.

This is the one that amazes me the most. Matthew, you may remember, sold out to the Roman government. The job that he had, of collecting taxes, was a job that was procured or bought from the Roman government. He then, became a traitor to the Hebrews. So Matthew, wanting to be rich, purchased the job from the Roman government and then, would answer to them as his authority for his job.

Simon the Zealot hated Rome. In fact, in that day, there were four groups: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Essenes, and the Zealots. The Zealots were the last group to emerge that we have a record of. The Zealots hated Roman authority and would carry on literally, guerrilla warfare to overthrow Rome.

The Zealots, in fact, after the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, formed a band and founded the most fascinating retreat. From that retreat, they would carry on guerrilla activity. We know of the retreat as Masada. Finally, the Romans discovered Masada and overthrew the Zealots, which was probably the end of the group.

Simon attached himself to that red hot patriotic band that hated Rome. And now he is going to spend three and a half years with a man who sold out to Rome?! Under any other circumstances, I think Simon would have put a dagger in Matthew's ribs.

Somehow, however, Jesus Christ forms these men together so that they actually get along, without too many episodes. It is amazing.

I think of the body in our church and of all the differences that are represented. There are political differences. Some vote democratically and some vote republican. There are emotional differences. There are spiritual differences in the levels that we find ourselves on. It is amazing that we can be banded together for a purpose. Yet, Jesus Christ is in the business of doing that.

I recently read that:

- Longfellow could take a piece of paper worth nothing, write a poem on it, and make it worth thousands – that is called genius.
- Rockefeller could sign his name to a blank check and it would be worth millions – that is called riches.
- A mechanic can take a fifty dollar piece of material and make something out of it worth hundreds – that is called skill.
- A painter can take a fifty cent piece of canvas and splash something on it and make it worth thousands – that is called art.
- Jesus Christ can take worthless, sinful people, cleanse them by His blood, and blend them together to promote His cause – that is the greatest miracle of all, and that is called grace.

The Inadequacies of the Chosen Twelve

Now, let us take a look at some of the inadequacies of the chosen twelve – and oh, were there inadequacies! I will give three.

1. The first inadequacy is that the disciples had a tremendous lack of understanding.

It is amazing, as we study these men, that they did not have a clue as to what Jesus Christ was trying to do. In fact, after three years, they still did not seem to be clued in to the kingdom program. They had a tremendous lack of understanding. Let me give a couple of examples.

Examples of the disciples' lack of understanding

- Look at Matthew 16:21-23. Notice the lack of understanding that is evidenced by the disciple known as Peter.

Mark 16:21 says,

From that time Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day.

This is the kingdom program. This is what is going to happen, now that the Jews have rejected Jesus. Notice what Peter does in verse 22.

Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "God forbid it, Lord! This shall never happen to You."

I am fascinated by Peter. The Lord stands up and says, "Men, I'm going to be crucified. I'm going to be buried. I'm going to rise again on the third day."

Then, Peter comes along and says, "Lord, look, as long as us twelve are here, the last thing You need to worry about is death. We'll take care of everything. It's all under control."

He had no understanding at all of what Jesus Christ was trying to do. This is a tremendous example of a lack of understanding.

- In John 21:1-18, the disciples again show a lack of understanding.

Jesus Christ was, in fact, crucified and was buried. Do the twelve men continue to propagate all the claims of Jesus Christ? No. They go back to fishing.

In John 21, the Lord appears, mysteriously, on the seashore of the Sea of Galilee. He is walking along and there are Peter and the others, out there fishing again.

Jesus pulls them in and says, in effect, "Listen, men, don't you realize that I called you to be fishers of men, not fishers of fish? Peter, don't you love Me?"

"Well, yes, Lord, I do."

"Then what are you doing fishing? Feed My sheep."

He asked Peter that question several times. There was no understanding.

Christ's solution

What was Christ's solution to the disciples' inadequacy of a lack of understanding? His solution, in one word, is instruction.

Jesus Christ never stopped teaching. In fact, Acts 1, tells us that Jesus spent forty more days, after He rose from the grave, teaching His disciples and

making sure that they understood. Then, He left a record for them, and would, through them, create a record so that we, as well, can be instructed.

What is the solution to a lack of understanding, ladies and gentlemen? It is not a program; not some kind of ministry. The solution is instruction; teaching. That was the solution of Christ.

2. A second inadequacy of the disciples is that they had a tremendous lack of commitment.

Example of the disciples' lack of commitment

In Mark 14:50, we are told that when Jesus Christ was captured,

. . . they all left Him and fled.

Prior to this, the disciples had said, "Lord, we'll never deny You. We're with You until the end."

We always pick on Peter, but notice that Peter is the only one who followed the Lord to the courtyard. The other disciples had fled. John would later, show up at the cross.

There was a tremendous lack of commitment among the disciples. As long as Jesus was there, they said, "I've got it. I'm with You." However, when difficulty came, they all forsook Him and fled.

Christ's solution

What was the solution that Christ proposed for the disciples' inadequacy of a lack of commitment? It is a fascinating solution. It is, in one word, supplication.

In John 17, as we read at the beginning of our discussion today, Jesus Christ prayed for His disciples.

One thing that you and I face is a lack of commitment. However, isn't it interesting to note that Jesus Christ, at this very moment, is praying; is interceding for you and for me.

A lack of commitment cannot be helped by doing something more. It is, in fact, going to improve through a process of maturing. Who do you think is interested, even more than we are, in that process? Jesus Christ.

Jesus, in fact, not only prayed for His disciples, but we read in Matthew 6 that He taught them how to pray.

I think, all of this was funneled so that these men would stick, which they, in fact, did. So Christ's solution was to pray.

3. The third inadequacy that I will give of the many that the disciples had, is that they had a lack of humility.

This inadequacy, the lack of humility, is one that I think, the Lord had to continually overcome in the life of His disciples. Let me give two examples of this.

Examples of the disciples' lack of humility

- Turn to Mark 9:33-37.

Look at verse 33.

They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?"

Jesus and the disciples had left, gone through Galilee, and had arrived at Capernaum at the house where they were perhaps, staying. I am sure the Lord knew what the disciples were discussing, but He wanted them to say it. So He said, "Men, what were you arguing about all the way here?"

According to my calculations, they walked between five and seven hours. So for five to seven hours, these men had been arguing. What were they arguing about? Notice verse 34.

But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.

The Lord is really making progress, isn't He?! He has pulled these men out. He is developing in their lives, all that He wants them to be, and they spend seven hours debating, "Let's see, Thomas, you can be the controller. Let's see, Peter, you be the president. And John, you be the vice president."

It sounds silly, does it not? But that is what they were doing. They were debating who would be the greatest in the coming kingdom.

- In Matthew 20:20-28, this debate got so hot, that James and John pulled their Mother into it.

Do you remember this passage? Can you believe it? This is fascinating. James and John are two grown men, and yet, they get their little Mother to come up to Jesus and speak for them. I can see it now. They are just standing there as she says, "Lord, when You come into Your kingdom, I want You to let

my son – my boy James; he's a good boy – sit on Your left, and my son John – he's a fine boy – sit on Your right."

I can just hear Peter snickering in the background, as he says to the others, "Look, they got their Mother to do it for them."

These are grown men! They were so concerned that they become the greatest.

Christ's solution

What is Christ's solution to the disciples' inadequacy of a lack of humility? It is, in one word, example. He gave the disciples a role model of a servant.

Let us say that I come up to you, in my frailty, and say to you, "I want to teach you humility. Wash my feet."

That is the way I would solve this humility problem. I would say, "Wash my feet. I haven't washed them for a week. I'm going to teach you humility."

Jesus Christ, however, turns it around and says, "I want to teach you men humility. Let me wash your feet."

So, in John 13, He takes a cloth and has the disciples take off their sandals. Their feet were dirty, since they had been walking. Jesus Christ was a role model for them – He played the part of a servant.

This was an illustration that they would never, ever forget. As far as we know, throughout scripture, the apostles exhibited tremendous humility. They learned it from the Master.

Application

By way of application, I want to ask four questions.

1. First, do you want to be a disciple?

Now that is a profound question, isn't it? However, that is where it all started. Jesus Christ came to these men, individually, and literally said the same thing, "Do you want to be My disciple?"

They could have said, "Yes," or "No." They had every opportunity to back out. In fact, hundreds of people did. The scriptures tells us that they would leave and follow Him no more.

The first question that we have to ask ourselves is, “Are we willing to be a disciple? Are we willing to be a ‘mathetes’; a ‘learner’?”

If you say, “Yes,” to this question, then you must say, “Yes,” to three more questions.

2. Secondly, are you involved in study; in instruction?

Jesus Christ, in making you a disciple, has to overcome the inadequacy of a lack of understanding. Are you involved in studying the record?

3. Thirdly, are you involved in supplication?

Supplication overcomes the inadequacy of a lack of commitment. Are you involved in prayer, not only for yourself, but for the lives of other believers? That is the example of Jesus Christ.

4. Fourthly, are you involved in serving?

In other words, are you a role model as a servant, or must you be served?

There was once a great violinist who wanted to prove a point. He rented a music hall and announced that he would play a concert on a \$20,000 violin. On the night of the concert, the music hall was packed. People came to hear this man play such a tremendous instrument.

After all the people arrived and were seated, the Maestro stood on the stage and began to play his music. It was beautiful! It was tremendous! Then,

halfway through his concert, he, all of the sudden, stopped, threw the violin down, stomped on it and broke it, and walked off stage. The people were horrified!

The stage manager then came on the stage and addressed the people. He said, “The Maestro wants you to know that he was not playing a \$20,000 violin, but a \$20 violin. He will now come back and finish his concert on a \$20,000 violin.”

The Maestro returned to the stage and finished his concert. Very few people could tell the difference. The point that he had wanted to make was that the violin does not make the music, the violinist does.

That is the point, my friends, of discipleship. It does not matter how unqualified you are or I am. It does not matter how weak; how frail our hands may be. It does not matter how often we may turn and run. Jesus Christ wants to play beautiful music. He wants to take your life and make you into a “mathetes,” a learner that He may then, in turn, make into an “apostolos,” an apostle, or one sent; one representing Him. And, He will do it.

Most of us are \$20 violins, but Jesus can use us. The question for us is the same question the disciples faced. Jesus Christ waits to hear our, “Yes,” that He might transform our lives and we might, in turn, like the early disciples, transform the world.

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