

12. Jesus Calls the Apostles

In our previous studies of the life of Jesus, we've seen passages that speak about the disciples. A disciple is like a student or apprentice. It is someone who follows a master/teacher to learn from him and even to come to resemble him. Jesus had many disciples.

After a while, he chose twelve of the disciples to become apostles. Actually they would still be called disciples or students throughout the Gospels, but Jesus began to prepare them for a special role... a very important role.

"Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles" (Luke 6:12,13). The Gospel of Mark adds:

"Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, 'Sons of Thunder'; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him." (Mark 3:14-19)

According to Acts 4:13, these men were not very educated but were rather men of the people. Four of them were fishermen. One of them was a tax collector, a profession detested by the majority of the Jews. But Jesus saw in these twelve men the qualities necessary for a spiritual mission; a mission so important that Jesus spent the whole night in prayer before making his choice. So what was the work of an apostle?

THE ROLE OF APOSTLES

The word apostle means "someone who is chosen and sent with a special mission as a fully authorized representative of the one who sends him." The Bible itself uses the word in two ways. Sometimes it is in the broad and unofficial sense to speak about someone who is sent by an assembly to preach, like those we often call "missionaries." But generally the Bible uses the word "apostle" in the more limited sense of someone who was chosen by Jesus Christ himself and

to whom he gave certain powers and the authority to speak in his name. So we see that Jesus gave these men the mission to preach and the power to cast out demons and to heal diseases.

But the essential role of these twelve men was that of witnesses. They had the privilege of knowing Jesus in a deeper and more intimate way, of attesting to the reality of his resurrection from the dead, and of giving his teachings to the world. Several passages bring out the nature of the work the apostles would have to do.

In John 15:26,27, Jesus said to the apostles, "But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with Me from the beginning." Because they needed to bear witness about Jesus, the Holy Spirit helped them to remember what they had heard from him. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you" (John 14:26). As Jesus prepared to return to Heaven, he reminded the apostles, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Some days later, the apostles and other disciples of Jesus were gathered together, and Peter talked to them about Judas Iscariot, who had betrayed Jesus and who had then committed suicide. By his treason, he had disqualified himself as an apostle of Jesus. Appealing to biblical prophecies, Peter concluded, "Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection" (Acts 1:21,22). This is the reason Matthias was chosen.

A few years later, Peter announced the good news to Cornelius and his family. Again he emphasized the idea that the apostles were eyewitnesses of the resurrection of Jesus:

"Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to us who

ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead. And He commanded us to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.” (Acts 10:40-42)

The fact that the witnesses were chosen in advance could seem to compromise the value of their testimony, as though there had been a kind of complicity. This could have been the case if witnesses had been chosen because they were men who might have had an interest at stake that would lead them to lie or if they were men who could be easily deceived.

Actually, we can see the opposite is true on both points. The apostles, having been scattered after the arrest of Jesus, were in fear after his death. When Jesus appeared to them, “the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, ‘Peace be with you’” (John 20:19). They did not see any advantage to being associated with the name of Jesus. When they began a few weeks later to testify openly about Jesus, their fears were shown to be justified. Because of their testimony, they were beaten and imprisoned, and eventually some of them were put to death. They evidently were not seeking personal benefit when they gave their testimony.

In the same way, the apostles and other witnesses “chosen in advance” would not have been individuals who could easily make a mistake concerning the identity of one who presented himself to them as Jesus returned from the dead. They were the very ones who had eaten and drunk with him, who knew him intimately. If Jesus had appeared to all the people, some of them might have doubted later and the testimony of all would have been compromised.

THE CASE OF PAUL

The apostle Paul is a rather exceptional case. He was not with the twelve during the early ministry of Jesus, although he certainly had opportunities to see and hear Jesus as he preached publicly. Paul himself said that he was an apostle but that he did not deserve to be one because he had persecuted the church before he believed in Jesus. Nevertheless, although he was not with the twelve from the beginning, he emphasized the fact that he had also witnessed the resurrection of Jesus, something that was necessary in order for one to be an apostle. He said in 1 Corinthians 9:1, “Am I not an apostle? Am I not free? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” These

two ideas had to go together. In 1 Corinthians 15, after having spoken of occasions when the risen Savior appeared to the other apostles, Paul said, “Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.” (1 Corinthians 15:8)

Again, let us emphasize the fact that the role of the apostles, then, was to give to the world proof that Jesus was raised from the dead and that he was truly the Christ, the Son of God. They were supposed to, as inspired witnesses, talk to the world about what Jesus did and taught during his life on earth and faithfully pass on to the church the commandments of the Lord and the truths which he had revealed to them. They were not administrators or managers of a worldly organization. They were not executives or leaders of a religious hierarchy, charged with supervising or developing its strategies. Their role was, above all, to witness, proclaim and teach.

THE EXISTENCE OF FALSE APOSTLES

Today, many people call themselves “apostles.” But, for reasons that we have just seen, they cannot be true apostles of Jesus Christ. First of all, they are not witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, they have not seen the risen Christ. Some do claim to have seen him as the apostle Paul did, but Paul said that he was the last.

Some are called apostles because their Church has given them this title. But an organization cannot name a witness if the person did not see that of which he or she is supposed to be a witness. Others wear the title of bishop instead of apostle, but they say that in that role they are successors of the apostles. However, a witness cannot have a successor.

If I saw two cars run into each other, I am a witness of the accident. But I cannot, before I die, name my son as successor, as a witness of the accident in my place if he was not present and did not see the cars in question. In the same way, the apostles never called bishops their successors and did not describe them as witnesses. Besides, the apostles received miraculous powers from the Savior. The apostle Paul did miracles and called them the signs of his apostleship: “Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds” (2 Corinthians 12:12).

Those who call themselves apostles or successors to the apostles these days do nothing comparable to the miracles the Bible describes. Moreover, their teaching completely departs from that of true

apostles, which is preserved for us in the New Testament.

Even in the first century, there were men like these who falsely claimed to be apostles of Christ. “For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ” (2 Corinthians 11:13). It is not bad to not recognize the titles that people wrongly take to themselves. Rather Jesus praised the church in Ephesus in these terms: “I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars” (Revelation 2:2).

CONCLUSION

By their work, true apostles laid a foundation upon which Christianity must stand in all the generations to come (Ephesians 2:20). The apostle Peter said that he had written in order that after his departure, men could remember the things they had been taught (2 Peter 2:15). He did not count on successors but on the Scriptures. In the pages of the Bible, Peter and the other apostles left us a constitution, a guide to follow. As the apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:6, “He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.”