



**“And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15).**

### **Service Then and Now**

**Central Truth:** Every Christian can serve Christ by involvement in worldwide evangelism.

**L554. Date:** April 1980. **Text:** Mark 3:13-19; 6:7-13; 16:14, 15.

**Topic:** Apostles; Church: Beginning of; Preaching.

The parenthesis containing the last three lessons has closed. We return now to the historical sequences of events which was left after Lesson 3 for March 16, 1980. It is suggested that you look back to that lesson and see its historical relationship with this week's study. The parenthesis containing the last three lessons jumped forward to review the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus that those might be studied during the Easter season.

Jesus had arrived at a most important point in His ministry. He had clearly defined His message. He had settled upon His method. He was ready to select His messengers. Because there was so much work (healing, preaching, etc.) to be done and so much opposition arising against Him, Jesus resolved that was the time to organize separately the people of God. Many people look upon the events of this week's study as the time when Jesus instituted the church.

The occasion was very solemn for the Lord. He prefaced it with an all night vigil in prayer (Luke 6:12). He called certain of His disciples to Him, selected twelve to be His apostles, and preached the Sermon on the Mount as their ordination message. What a sacred day, indeed!

The selection of the apostles was the beginning of a ministry which continues until today. Service for Christ was the same then as it is now.

### **I. THE SERVICE (Mark 3:13-15; 6:7)**

Three important things are essential for one to render effective service for the Lord. (1) He must have the call of God. (2) He must be commissioned of God. (3) He must have the power of God. All three essentials were evident in Jesus' selection of the twelve apostles.

*A. Service is possible for those who are called of God* (verses 13, 14). Jesus exercised His sovereign will in selecting the apostles. He called to himself those whom He wanted. From among the total, He specified twelve and called them His “apostles” (meaning, “sent ones”). They agreed to follow Him, but they chose Him only after He had chosen them. Long afterward, on the night of His betrayal and arrest, He told them, “*Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain*” (John 15:16). They came to Him in response to His call, leaving behind them whatever was not helpful to them in their service for Him (Mark 10:28).

God issues a call to some to serve in special places. We call them “missionaries, pastors, evangelists.” But God issues a call to each to serve Him in some place. No Christian can stand “idle in the marketplace” and excuse himself by saying, “No man has hired me” (see Matthew 20:3, 6, 7). Each Christian is saved to serve.

*B. Service is possible for those who live with the Lord* (verse 14). The first mark of disciples is that they are with their Lord. The spirit of the Christ is understood and assumed only by those who spend time in His presence. Others might come and go, fluctuating in their commitment to Him, but true disciples must identify themselves with Him all the time. That is why Bible study and prayer are so essential to the growing and serving Christian.

Christian service is not sharing a doctrine. It is representing a person. Christian witnessing is not repeating a message. It is representing a person. Christian faith is not belief of facts. It is personal confidence in a person. The person of Jesus Christ is the essence of the Christian religion.

Before the apostles could be sent out as the representatives of Jesus, they had to spend time in the personal presence of Jesus. Service was the same then as it is now. You can never be an effective witness for Jesus until you have lived in His presence.

*C. Service is expressed in witness for the Lord* (verse 14; 6:7). To be “sent forth to preach” is the highest privilege a believer could ever have in the service of God. It is a commission to be a witness for Him.

Jesus selected the apostles that He might send them out to be witnesses for Him. He equipped them with two things. (1) He gave them the message they were to proclaim. They were to be His heralds. Like the prophets of old who prefaced their message with “Thus saith the Lord,” they were to

announce the message which Jesus gave them. (2) He gave them a power. They were to cast out demons and to heal sicknesses. The expressions of power were never to become an end in themselves (as some people announce “miracle night” or “healing services” today). The important thing was the message. The power was only to authenticate the message and the messengers. Blessed is the witness, then as now, who goes forth with a sense of commission from his Lord.

The power of the early disciples surprised them. Like the seventy witnesses who were commissioned at a later time, the twelve probably “*returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name*” (Luke 10:17). Jesus never sends out witnesses without the power to do their work. “*Behold, I give unto you power . . . over all the power of the enemy*” (Luke 10:19).

## II. THE SERVANTS

Jesus selected twelve men to be His apostles. Judging from worldly standards, He chose men with no special qualifications at all. They could not boast of wealth, high social position, special education, or training in theology. They were twelve ordinary men. They had two great qualities: commitment to the person and work of Jesus, and courage to identify themselves with Him. Yet, Jesus chose them.

They were twelve in all. As there were twelve tribes in Israel, so there were twelve apostles of Jesus. That probably indicated that He was establishing a “new Israel,” a “spiritual Israel” (Romans 9:6-8; Galatians 3:16-29).

The twelve apostles were arranged around Jesus in three groups. Those groups numbered three men, eight men, and one man, each moving outward from the Lord.

What a collection of men they were! Peter and Andrew were brothers, as were James and John; all four were fishermen by vocation. Peter (whose name was Simon before Jesus changed it) was unstable and subject to extremes of feeling and action. James and John were so quick tempered and explosive that Jesus nicknamed them “Sons of Thunder.” Philip was a practical man who always counted the cost, but his devotion to Jesus was as great as that of any other disciple. Bartholomew (also called Nathanael), was marked by such personal purity of life that Jesus said of him, “*Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!*” (John 1:47). Matthew was a tax-collector (publican) turned disciple, but because of his former occupation was looked upon as a social outcast by many. James the Less (meaning the

younger or the one shorter in stature) was probably the son of Mary, a devout disciple of Jesus. Thaddaeus (called Lebbaeus and “Judas not Iscariot”) wanted Jesus to get into the limelight and institute His messianic kingdom immediately. Simon was a Zealot, frantically patriotic and opposed to the Roman government of Palestine, fomenting rebellion at every opportunity. Judas Iscariot (meaning, “Judas man of Kerioth”) was the treasurer in the band of disciples, respected by each of them, but later the one who betrayed the Lord. How different and difficult they were.

The amazing thing is that Jesus chose such men as these and (with the exception of Judas Iscariot) welded them into such a unified group that they became the foundation of the early church, a foundation of which He was the chief cornerstone (Ephesians 2:20).

### **III. THE SCHEDULE (Mark 6:8-13)**

The Lord set out specific details to guide the apostles on their first preaching tour. He organized them in teams of two each, and empowered them for their work. Their instructions are enlightening for Christian service today.

*A. Depend upon God for provision (verses 8-10).* They were forbidden to take supplies for their journey; no scrip, no bread, no money, and just one set of clothing. They were going out almost destitute! How would they be supplied? They must learn that God is their Source and depend upon Him to supply every need.

Such dependence on God does not teach against wisdom in preparation today. In fact, the Lord afterward changed that restriction. *“When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip”* (Luke 22:35, 36). There is no virtue in poverty. Jesus teaches Christians to depend on God.

*B. Represent the Lord alone (verses 10, 11).* The person who would receive their message was to be dealt with. The one who refused their message was to be rejected, the very dust of the town being shaken off the feet as an indication of such rejection. That indicated some places would receive them and others would not. They were to have no commitments apart from their Lord. *“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me”* (John 13:20). Both the message and the messenger belong to God. There can be no higher privilege than to represent Him.

*C. Depend upon God for power (verses 12, 13).* God was faithful. They

did not lack food. They did not lack raiment. They did not lack opportunities for ministry. They did not lack power for the task at hand. He was faithful then as now.

Here are the marks of the Christian disciple which are suggested in the ministry of the Twelve. Let the Christian be completely open to the people, completely trusting the God whom he serves, and completely unselfish to give rather than to get. Those principles are valid today. Try to live by them.

#### **IV. THE COMMISSION**

Here are” the marching orders” of the church: *“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15).

The first apostles were sent only to *“the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matthew 10:5, 6). They ministered only in the land of Palestine. Then Jesus taught them the truth that *“repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations”* (Luke 24:47). That opened the door to a worldwide missionary ministry which continues today.

Examine the commission of Mark 16:15. The imperative is “go.” The place is “an the world.” The work is “preach.” The message is “the gospel.” The prospect is “every creature.” That is the blessed commission under which they ministered then, and under which we minister now.

Service for God, then as now, is simply getting the gospel message into the hearing of every person in the world. One is won to be matured to win yet another, until all the world has heard.

*“And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come”* (Matthew 24:14).

1. How does Luke 6:12 show the concern of Jesus in selecting apostles?
2. Why did Jesus choose the Twelve?
3. In what sense is every Christian called to serve?
4. What does it mean to be a witness for Jesus?
5. How did Jesus give power to the apostles and to us?
6. How were the apostles grouped around Jesus? Why?
7. What kind of men did Jesus choose for apostles?
8. How does Mark 6:8-10 compare with Luke 22:35, 36?
9. How does Mark 16:15 relate to you personally?
10. What can you do this week to help fulfill the Great Commission?