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Swift Creek Baptist Church (swiftcreekbaptistchurch.com)
18510 Branders Bridge Rd., Colonial Heights, VA 23834
Sunday, October 1, 2023

Mark 3:13-19, 33-35 “The New People of God”

Intro. Up to this point in the gospel of Mark our Lord has attracted huge crowds. He has preached and done miracles like no other man. But now He has reached a crisis in His ministry. The religious leaders had become very hostile toward Jesus because He refused to play by their rules, they were jealous of His success, and because He exposed them for the hypocrites they were. They and some of the political leaders were already plotting His death, as stated in v.6. Yet even though great crowds were still following Jesus, many were not interested in spiritual things. They were interested in seeing miracles. They were hoping that Jesus would deliver the nation and defeat Rome. Only a relatively small number of people were true disciples.

Even though the situation was beginning to look bleak for Jesus, God is able to turn man’s evil into good. You see, the rejection of Jesus by the leaders of Israel, and later by most of the Jews, opened the door for Jesus to establish a new people of God, not only made up of Jews but people from every nation (see Romans 9-11). That is why the Church exists today, totally separate from Judaism.

So this morning we are going to take a look at some truths about the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. We will learn how the church began. We will learn about the mission of the church. We will find out if you are truly a part of His church. Finally, we will consider an important warning that Jesus gives that applies to the church.

Now, against the backdrop of open rejection of Jesus by the leaders of Israel, let’s consider first of all:

I. THE BEGINNING OF HIS CHURCH

In v.13 we read, “And He went up on the mountain¹ and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him.” Jesus considered the appointment of the Twelve so very important, that according to Luke’s gospel (6:12), He spent the preceding night in prayer on one of the mountains that surrounded the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was about to ordain twelve men who would be His spokesmen, His representatives to the people of Israel, and then to the world. This is a big decision and Jesus wanted to be sure that He knew the mind of the Father. What an example He is to us in regard to the importance of prayer! How much more do *we* need to pray for guidance and strength as we face each day.

Notice again that He “called to Him those He Himself wanted.” According to Luke’s Gospel (6:13), this was a larger group of disciples, called out from the multitude.² Then in v.14 we see that out of that larger group “He appointed twelve,” called to a special place of service. We also see in the last of v.13 that it was His sovereign choice that He made based on His Own will. Jesus said in John 15:16, “You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit....”

¹ We don’t know which mountain. It was probably in the general vicinity of Capernaum [Hendriksen].

² Later, Luke 10:1 says, “After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.”

Why did He choose twelve apostles? That number is significant because there were twelve tribes in the nation of Israel, who descended from the twelve sons of Jacob. Israel was chosen to bring the Messiah into the world so that through Him all the nations of the earth could be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). They were to bear witness of God to the nations. However, the nation of Israel was now spiritually decayed and ready to reject her own Messiah. So the Lord is calling the leadership of a new people of God in the world. I believe it is significant that Jesus did not select the twelve until *after* He was rejected by the leaders of Israel. The twelve apostles were to become the nucleus or foundation of a new “spiritual nation” (Matt. 21:43; Eph. 2:20). God has chosen to work through us to bring the blessing of salvation to the world, something Israel failed to do.

Could you name from memory the 12 disciples? Notice beginning in v.16 who Jesus selected to be His 12 apostles: “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 Boan’erges, that is, ‘Sons of Thunder’.” Those three formed our Lord’s inner circle (see 5:37; 9:2-13; 14:33). Then He chose “Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew³, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus⁴, Simon the Cananite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him.”⁵ I am not going to go into much detail about these men. I only want to make a few general points about them, and then give a few specific examples. First, Christ chose common men. Isn’t that interesting? Many were common fishermen, or they had other common occupations. Not one was a Rabbi or priest! Second, they had varied backgrounds. Matthew was a former tax collector and “Simon the Cananite” was a former anti-Roman zealot. I say that because “Cananite” was an Aramaic surname meaning zealot. In fact, Luke calls him “Simon the Zealot” (Luke 6; Acts 1:13). The fact that Andrew and Philip both had Greek names may indicate that they were from families in northern Galilee that had become more highly influenced by Greek culture.⁶ Later, when some Greeks came seeking Jesus, Philip and Andrew were the ones that talked to them and were involved in bring them to Jesus (Jn. 7:20-22). Furthermore, they were also different in disposition. There was Peter the optimist (Matt. 14:28, 26, 33, 35), but also Thomas the pessimist. Peter was very vocal while John seemed to be more quiet-natured. Finally, at the beginning they were unfit to be His apostles. They lacked spiritual understanding, missing the point of Christ’s teachings. They lacked humility. They lacked faith. They lacked power. These men were always getting into trouble; saying the wrong thing.

Yet in spite of their weaknesses, the Lord used these men to turn the world upside down for His glory. If He can use *them*, surely He can use us too! That gives me hope today! It is encouraging to see what Jesus was able to do with such a diversified group of unlikely candidates for Christian service. Jesus patiently led them along, filled them with His Spirit and shocked the world with the way He used these men (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26-28). I am convinced that He can and will use us, if we will place the clay of our lives in His hand and let Him mold us into what He wants us to be for His glory.

So the Lord has appointed the foundation for His Church, a new people of God. Now we need to know what the Church is to do and accomplish. So let’s see next:

³ Bartholomew is clearly the Nathaniel of John's Gospel (1:45-49; 21:2).

⁴ He was called Lebbaeus in certain manuscripts of Matt. 10:3 Mark 3:18. He is in all probability the "Judas not Iscariot" of John 14.

⁵ In all the lists of the apostles, the three groups of four begin alike (Simon, Philip, James).

⁶ Both were from Bethsaida, on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, just west of the Jordan River, which had a stronger Gentile influence than cities to the south and east.

II. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

When He selected them, He had three purposes in mind. I believe what they were to do in vv.14-15 is a pattern for the church today. We need to understand and carry out our mission as a church. So what are we to do?

A. We Are to Receive Training as Disciples – V.14 says, “Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him⁷....” Christ appointed them to receive training by seeing His personal example and hearing His teaching (cf. Acts 1:21-22). Jesus would spend more time with *them* than anyone else. For them such association meant engaging in discipleship and spiritual edification. They would also share with Him the toil of ministry and even His suffering to some degree (10:39) as further preparation for their own ministry. They were not ready to be sent forth until they had been with Jesus for some time.

While we can't be in the physical presence of Jesus, we should “be with Him” each day in prayer and Bible reading. He should study Him and walk in His steps. Being with Jesus should be the first priority in each of our lives. If we would be like Him, then we must spend time with Him. You can be as close to the Lord as you desire! James 4:8 says, “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”

When I was a boy, I would spend a week every summer with my grandmother in Gainesville, Georgia. There were boys in her neighborhood that I would play with. I noticed that by the end of the week I tended to talk like them, act like them, and engage in the same activities they enjoyed. Indeed, we tend to become more like the people we spend time with. Even so, as you spend time with Jesus, you become more like Jesus.

We also see a pattern for discipleship here. Pastors are to spend time with deacons and other leaders, training them, and being an example to them. I would have deacons go with me on visitation. Then the more experienced deacons should take the new deacons visiting with them. There should be an ongoing mentoring process in the church today. And when you are given opportunity to spend time with one of the godly leaders of our church, you should take advantage of that opportunity. Hearing sermons online or even in person is not enough. Christianity is caught as well as taught. Pastors and other disciple-makers need to spend time with those who are being disciplined.

Furthermore, when your church or our state convention offers training opportunities, you should take advantage of those opportunities. Like the apostles, we need training to do the work of the Lord.

B. We Are to Send Preachers and Missionaries Out to Preach the Gospel – V.14 also says that Jesus “appointed twelve, that ... He might send them out to preach.” Yes, their first responsibility was to become preachers of the gospel of Jesus. Jesus was a preacher and His apostles must become preachers to extend and multiply His ministry.

That task involved going to various places to preach. The word “apostles” means “sent ones.” It refers to a “representative of the king; one who preaches (*kerusso*) with the king's authority; one who must not be ignored.” So from the very beginning we see that the Church is to be missionary in our work.

Like the apostles, the faithful minister ought to be a preacher of the good news of salvation. He ought to proclaim the Word of God. This must always be his primary work, for this is listed

⁷ Only Mark adds this detail.

first. We ought to call upon people to repent of sin, believe in Jesus, and follow Him as disciples. A minister who doesn't preach the true Word of God is of little use to the church of Christ. He is a lighthouse without a light, a silent trumpeter, and a sleeping watchman.

In a 2005 column for *Church Central*, church growth expert Thom Rainer said his research showed something that may be surprising to some. In churches which are effectively reaching unchurched people, their pastors spend significantly more time preparing to preach than in the non-growing churches. Effective preachers spent an average of 20 hours a week and comparison church pastors spent an average of two hours a week working on sermons.⁸ In light of Scripture and this research, I hope you will support your pastor's efforts to give a significant amount of time to the preaching ministry that God has called him to.

Is God calling anyone in my audience to preach the Gospel? If so, you need to surrender to that call. Most of you have not been called to preach, but He has called you to bear witness for Him. He has also called you to serve Him. So get busy and witness for Him, and serve Him. He has called you to support preachers and missionaries with your prayers and offerings.

Finally, we also see in our text that:

C. We Are to Minister to the Suffering – Note in v.15 that Christ gave them “power [authority] to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.” Textual evidence suggests that reference to granting authority to “heal sicknesses” is missing from Mark's account, but those words are included in Mt. 10:1 and Luke 9:1 in similar contexts. Clearly, they were to extend that healing and liberating ministry of Jesus.

Notice how closely connected were their preaching and healing ministries. Why was that? You see, their message was to be authenticated by miracles of healing, and casting out demons. The people knew that Jesus was a Healer and that He had power over demonic spirits. When the disciples came preaching and demonstrating that *same* power, the people knew that their message was real and that they were truly the servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, these twelve men would thus be able to continue His work when He returned to the Father.

Are we to continue such miracles today? I wish we could. I would start with healing my wife! But these miracles were unique to the apostles, as stated in 2 Cor. 12:12 (see also Acts 2:43; 5:12). Oh, some people on TV and elsewhere claim to be able to heal and such. Well, if they can heal, let them follow the New Testament model and heal *whoever* they meet that needs healing like Jesus and the disciples did! No, these people only appear to heal those who come to their crusades, or who send them money. We do not *need* to validate our message with those kinds of miracles. The gospel has already been authenticated with written eyewitness records of these miracles in the New Testament. Furthermore, every time Christ saves a soul and delivers a sinner from the grip of his or her sins, He is validating His message. Every time an alcoholic or drug addict is set free, He validates His message. Every time a marriage is put back together, He validates His message. Every time a redeemed saint of God can stand and give testimony to the life-changing, soul-saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ, He validates His message!

Even though this commission to do those kinds of miracles does not apply today, the end result of their work is to be continued by the church. We *are* to do good works. We are to minister to the needs of people. We are to visit and pray with the sick and share the hope of Scripture. We are to minister to people who were suffering in other ways, such as the way of our Southern Baptist disaster relief workers minister to people. We are to oppose the work of Satan. We are speak out against sin and the devil's deception. We are to proclaim God's victory over evil, and how we can

⁸ Quoted in *Preaching Now*, January 18, 2005.

share in that victory. The Bible says, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” We are to help people experience deliverance from whatever evil enslaves them, through prayer, Scripture and discipleship.

What a great work we are to do. After receiving training, we are to proclaim or bear witness to the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. We are to minister to those in need. Are you involved in this great work? Now let us move from the work of the church to:

III. THE TRUE MEMBERS OF HIS CHURCH

Who is truly a part of this church that Jesus established? The true Church is made up of the true people of God who are involved in this great work I have been speaking about. Are you a part of God’s true Church? Well let’s see based on this text of Scripture.

Consider the background to this important teaching. After Jesus was told that His mother and brothers were outside wanting to see Him (vv.31-32), Jesus said in vv.33-35, “Who is My mother, or My brothers?” And He looked around at those who sat about Him, and said, “Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.” Matthew adds that He was stretching out His hand toward His disciples.

Our Lord was not being rude to His family when He remained in the house and did not immediately try to see them. He knew that they meant well, but *their will* was definitely contrary to God’s will. As we see in v.21, they thought He was becoming mentally imbalanced and too extreme in His mission! They probably wanted him to come back to Nazareth, resume a “real” job, get married, and settle down. Jesus could not let them interfere with His mission. So instead of giving in, He used this crisis as an opportunity to teach a spiritual lesson. Notice a few truths we can glean from these verses. First, let us see:

A. How We *Do Not* Become Members of His Church - Jesus was saying and *demonstrating* that blood relation does not give anyone an advantage spiritually. Being a person who is a Jew or even a part of Jesus’ own physical family will not save anyone. Even Jesus own brothers did not believe in Him at this point, and if they had remained in unbelief, they would’ve remained lost.

Likewise, physical birth into a Christian family does not make you a Christian. You need to have your own personal faith in Christ. For example, just because your parents are saved doesn’t mean that you are automatically a Christian. You need to make a personal decision to repent of your sins and trust in Jesus as Savior.

B. How We *Do* Become Members of His Church - How does one enter into the family of God? One enters into the family of God by means of a new birth, a spiritual birth from above (John 3:1-7; 1 Peter 1:22-25). In fact, Jesus said in John 3, “You must be born again.” When you are born again, you share God’s divine nature (2 Peter 1:3-4) and can call God “Father” (Rom. 8:15-16). This spiritual birth is not something that *we* accomplish for ourselves, nor can others do it for us (John 1:11-13). It is God’s work of grace; all we can do is believe and receive (Eph. 2:8-9). So you see, when you become a follower of Christ, your family is no longer just your physical family, but you also have a spiritual family. And you will find that as you grow in Christ, you will tend to feel a greater kinship with your spiritual family than with your physical family members who are not believers.

Have you been born again? If you say “yes,” how do you *know* you have been born again? After all, the Bible says we should make our calling and election sure. Here’s how you can know.

Jesus said in v.35, “For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.” The test of relationship with Jesus is obedience to His Father, not merely reciting a creed, or expressing religious emotion. Those who are born-again ought to have a family likeness, just as I look like my father and have some of his traits. Jesus was always obedient to His Heavenly Father. Even so, the born-again child of God will want to do God’s will, and habitually be able to do God’s will. 1 John 2:17 says, “...the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

Now I want to make it clear that Christ is not laying down the *means* of becoming His kinsmen, but one *evidence* that we are such. Faith is the root of obedience; obedience is the blossom of faith. Until there is a change of nature, there will not be a change in desires, and a life of obedience. You cannot do the will of God in your own strength. You must be born again and enabled by the Spirit of God and the living Word of God to do the will of God.

By the way, our Lord was not suggesting that believers ignore or abandon their families in order to serve God, but only that we put God’s will above everything else in life. Certainly it is God’s will that we care for our families and provide for them (see 1 Tim. 5:8), but we must not permit even our dearest loved ones to influence us away from the will of God. We are to put God first in our lives, family second, and self last.

I will give you another evidence that you have been truly born again. 2 Cor. 5:17 says, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” Even so, as you look at the 12 apostles, you see examples of men who experienced a change of life. Notice in v.16 that Simon’s name was changed to Peter, “the rock.” He was not that way by nature. In fact, he was just the opposite. He was outspoken and opinionated. He was rockheaded when he argued with Jesus (8:32-33).⁹ He was subject to swings in his mood and opinion (Jn. 13:8-9). But after Christ changed his life, he became a rock-solid leader for the Church. Levi the tax collector was a changed man. So his name was changed to Matthew, “the gift of God.” James and John were given the nickname, “sons of thunder.”¹⁰ We commonly think of John as the Apostle of love, but he certainly did not begin with that kind of reputation, nor did James his brother. Even so, Christ is still changing lives today, and it is through changed lives that Christ can work best.

C. Who May Become a Member of His Church - Again, Jesus said in v.35, “For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.” The word “whoever” (ος ... αυ) is very broad. “Disciples” other than the Twelve were certainly also included. It means people of all races; male and female; old and young; rich and poor; bond and free; educated and unlettered; Jew and Gentile. No one is excluded based on ethnicity or social standing.

Will you become a part of the family of God, the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ? You may, if you repent of your sins, and put your faith in Christ.

Oh, it is so important that we be a part of a caring community of believers. How much more is that true if our physical family is not aligned with us spiritually.

When President Lyndon Johnston left Washington to retire to his Texas ranch, he was asked why he would want to leave the city. He responded: “Out there they ask about you when you are sick and they cry when you die.” People need community and want someone to care for them

⁹ Garland, p.138.

¹⁰ This Hebrew nickname is given only by Mark and the reason for it is not clear. It may refer to the fiery temperament revealed in Luke 9:34 when James and John wanted to call down fire on the Samaritan villages that were unfriendly to them.

[Garland, p.146]. Will you provide such a community for people? People face enough hurt in the world, and too often in their own biological families. May the church of God not add to that hurt but bring healing to those hurts.

Conclusion: The greatest group of people on earth is the true Church of the Lord Jesus Christ. What sweet fellowship we can have. What love! We also are on a great mission, to save souls from sin, and lead them to experience new life in Christ. Don't you want to be a part of the true people of God? If you are not yet a born-again Christian, then I invite you to be saved today. If you are already saved, but not an active member of a local church, then I invite you to become a part of this church. Join us in this great work. Furthermore, those of you who are already members, are you doing your part to help fulfill the church's mission? Are you being trained? Are you supporting the preaching of God's Word with your prayers, your presence, and your offerings? Are you helping minister to the sick, and those in need? If not, it is time to get involved in this great work. Finally, are you helping to preserve the unity of our church? Let's trust God to enable us to make our church a united church on mission for Christ!

Sources: Alan Carr, notes from sermon on Mark 3:13-19 (www.sermonnotebook.org); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2023; David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Mark* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975); Alexander Maclaren, *Expositions of Holy Scripture*, Vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 4 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:80] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2021); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through *Online Bible*); J.C. Ryle (1816-1900), *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1993); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Diligent: Mark* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1987). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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