

SET APART FOR SERVICE

"And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach." Mark 3:14.

In all the ages God has turned mountains into the highest uses. Christ Jesus did the same thing at the outset of His public ministry when He converted a mountain into a pulpit for His first recorded sermon. Later He converted a mountain into a sanctuary, where He communed with God. In our Scripture lesson we see Him making a throne of the mountain, and from it He chose those who were to be associated the most closely with Him.

Christ had reached a great crisis in His ministry. From that day forward for Him the future became more dominant than the present. Before long it would become necessary for Him to leave the earth. Therefore it was necessary that He make preparation and provision for the carrying on of His work. That could be done only by the proper training of carefully selected men for such a momentous and lengthy task. That our Lord felt keenly the importance of making such a selection is seen in the fact that He spent the whole of the previous night in prayer. "And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God" (Luke 6:12). Christ had summoned a number of His many disciples to meet Him on the mountain on the following day. In all probability He explained why He had summoned them, after which He proceeded to secure twelve, whom He named Apostles, and destined them to make history.

It is good for us to try to see these men as they actually were, for they were creatures of flesh and blood, with high hopes and great fears, many defects and numerous fine qualities. No twelve men have influenced the world so tremendously as they, and no equal number could have looked less like doing so. Christ Himself was the determining factor. For the most part Christ has worked with unpromising material, but with it He has produced some marvelous results. How much these men had to learn about Christ, themselves, each other, the world and its need! No one except Christ could have gotten so much out of them.

Christ's choice of the Twelve was one in which He assumed all responsibility for what He did. "He called unto Him twelve, whom He Himself would." When He called them, it was not because they had asked to be called. Neither was there any room for protests of inability on their part. He assumed responsibility. If there were defects in them, and there were, He had to deal with them and remedy them. They were His choice and He chose them in the interest of His work. He chose them because they already had some powers which He needed; also, because they were capable of appropriating the power which He intended to supply. When He chose those men they were utterly inadequate to do the work, but He was quite able to empower them to do it. He chose them because there were capacities in them which He could employ to good advantage. That must never be forgotten. He also chose them because they were the best suited to the doing of His work.

I. The Chosen.

Christ chose men of good health. He did not want a group of invalids accompanying Him, and complaining all of the time how badly they felt. He left the delicate students at Jerusalem and Rome for their mothers and aunts to take care of, and He went down to the seashore and selected some of the fisherman with strong physiques. Have you ever wondered why

He chose fishermen instead of shepherds? First, because the shepherd dwelt apart from others while the fisherman was at home in the world of men. The shepherd lived a life of solitude, while the fisherman had a life of fellowship. Christ needed and wanted men who knew their fellows, who had mingled with them, and were mingling with them, in all the rough and tumble of life, listening to their chatter, aware of their hopes and aspirations and familiar with their psychology. Secondly, the shepherd was essentially an individualist, while the fisherman was one who was accustomed to cooperate with others. The shepherd worked on his own initiative, developing self-reliance and self-dependence to the full, while the fisherman never went to sea except in company. Christ wanted men who would work together as a team rather than be brilliant individualists, and so He chose some fishermen to be His apostles.

The Twelve were men of modest means and humble station. However, they were not paupers in any sense of the word. Even the fishermen among them owned their own boats and nets and employed others to assist them. Peter had a house large enough to accommodate his family and his friends. Matthew had some money, even though it was tainted. He left a lucrative job to follow Christ, and in gratitude for his salvation gave a great feast in his own house in honor of Christ. Judas had never allowed himself to feel the pinch of poverty. Nevertheless, no man of great wealth was included in this company. There was not an aristocrat among them, nor a beggar, although there is room for both in the Lord's churches. Neither wealth nor poverty is any bar to the fellowship of Christ. There is always a place among the followers of Christ for those who will yield themselves to Him and dedicate their possessions to Him. It usually happens, however, that He calls to largest service in greatest numbers those who are familiar with the needs, desires and interests of men, who have lived close to nature, and who understand the language, views and needs of the common people.

The Twelve were men of moderate ability. When they were called "unlearned and ignorant" by the rulers in Jerusalem, that did not mean that they were stupid or illiterate. It did mean that they had not attended the schools of the rabbis and had not received any technical education in the sacred Law. But, among them all there was not a scribe, a lawyer or a man of political, social or intellectual prominence. Moreover, they were men of the most diverse character. Peter, Andrew, James and John were the men of largest gifts and most striking personality. Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas and Matthew were the reflective, contemplative, questioning and slow to believe men. James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite and Judas Iscariot were the practical men of business who arranged the finances and other details for the group.

These men came to Christ, in response to His choice and call, in the freshness and vigor of their young manhood, each with his God-given talent, and each different from all the others in ability and in possibilities. Their glory consisted in the fact that Christ called them and they followed Him. The fact that not much is recorded about some of them does not mean that they were mere nobodies who accomplished very little. God keeps the records of all. He knows exactly how many sermons they preached, how many sinners they won to Christ and how many miracles they wrought, and will certainly reward them accordingly.

II. The Commission.

"And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach" (Mark 3:14). Christ chose, ordained and commissioned the Apostles:

1. To be with Him.

Christ appointed the Twelve that they should be with Him. There is something inexpressibly touching in that little sentence. Our Lord wanted friends. The beginning of His ministry had been solitary. He had gone forth alone to His work.

But now in this case He was in need of sympathetic fellowship. So He called these men to Him in order that He might get from them what only men can give to men -- sympathy, which is the outflow of responsive love, and the expression of real devotion. He desired to have them as companions, that they might be His friends. We know how the presence of a friend helps and cheers us in our hours of trial. Our Lord was like that too. With opposition and rejection and the bitter cross to face, He hungered for sympathy and longed for friends, so He called these twelve men, that they might be with Him. By their loyalty and affection they made things easier for Him. They were to be Christ's companions, partly to help Him by their sympathy and love, but partly also that they might learn of Him. They were to be His pupils.

Christ seeks to bring us to the place where we are really "with Him" in aim, in His estimates of value, in His outlook upon the world, in all that He stands for, and in all that He expresses. At this point there is an implication of the miraculous, for by nature we are very far from being with Christ, because we are self-centered, narrow, restricted in our thoughts, in our outlooks, in our sentiments, in our sympathies, and are seeking our own good always. But to be "with Him" surely implies a miracle of elimination, for there is much that must be taken from our lives if we are with Him. And not only a miracle of elimination, but of incorporation also, for there is much which must come into our lives if we are to be "with Him." And not only of elimination and incorporation but a miracle of subjugation also must be wrought in us, for there is much of anarchy in our inner beings; and if He is to be preeminent this miracle must be wrought.

2. To preach for Him.

The time of fellowship was meant to issue in service. Privilege always leads up to duty. The Twelve were made disciples that they might become apostles. They were blessed in order that they might become a blessing. Duty follows privilege still. Experience ought always to end in expression.

"And that He might send them forth," as the Father had sent Him. Think of all that is involved there, of service, of suffering, and of sacrifice. They were to go forth to preserve the attitudes of humility and lowliness in the world, to be among men as those whose delight it is to minister to their needs, not counting their lives dear unto them, so long as the service is accomplished and the Saviour is glorified.

Christ kept these men in His company and under His influence in order that He might prepare them to preach for Him. How diverse these men were with reference to their gifts! Yet Christ took what each one had and multiplied it. He did not make them men of one type. He never destroyed their individuality. He just took what they brought to Him, blessed it, increased its value and used it.

It is interesting to note that the ones who were closest in their intimacy with Christ, and that in keeping with their own desires, were subsequently the most prominent in the service of the Lord. It was no arbitrary favoritism which permitted Peter, James and John to be with Christ in the crises of His life. Those closest to Christ in intimacy were certainly the most conspicuous in subsequent service for Him. From this we learn that it is intimacy with Christ which confers upon us power for service.

If you hear Christ calling you to come closer to Him, it is just for this, that you may be "with Him" and that He may send you forth to witness for Him. Quite likely He will send you back to your congenial surroundings with a new love-light on your face and with a new thrill in your heart. Heed His call regardless of anything and everything else.