

Mark - the Master's Master Plan

by J. Glyn Owen

J. Glyn Owen's sermon explores the calling of the twelve disciples as a pivotal moment in Jesus' Master Plan amidst rising pressures and opposition.

Duration: 40:43

Scripture: Matthew 9:36, Matthew 10:1, Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 3:13-15, Mark 6:7, Luke 6:12, Luke 9:1-2

Topics: "Discipleship"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the calling of the twelve disciples by Jesus to constitute them as apostles. The preacher reads from Mark 3:13-15, where Jesus goes up a mountain and calls those whom he chooses to be with him. Jesus ordains them as twelve and sends them forth to preach, heal sicknesses, and cast out devils. The preacher emphasizes that this calling and training of the disciples is part of God's masterplan to bring salvation and redemption to the world through Jesus' sacrifice. The sermon encourages the listeners to commit themselves to Jesus and to follow his example.

Transcript

Will you turn in the scriptures to the Gospel recorded by Saint Mark, and we shall read verses 13, 14, and 15 at this point, though we shall want to look at these verses this morning in their entire context. Our subject is the Master's Master Plan. It really refers to the calling of the twelve disciples in order to constitute them as apostles and ultimately to send them forth into the world to engage in their God-given ministry.

Let's read then verses 13, 14, and 15, and he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would. And they came to him, and he ordained, the word in the Greek is made twelve, chose twelve, made twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach and to have power, to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils. There then is our subject for this morning, continuing our studies in this first Gospel, the Gospel recorded by Saint Mark.

Now, there are two things that combine in this context which I would like us to see together in order to get a wholesome picture of what is taking place here. We need to see two things related. First of all, the mounting pressures brought upon our Lord, and then over against that his Master Plan.

The plan is related to the pressures, though at the same time the plan of course doesn't emerge out of the pressures that men bring upon him, but the plan represents the purpose of God from all eternity. I want us

to look briefly, first of all, at the mounting pressures that are described in this passage, particularly reading from the first verse of chapter 3 right on to our text. Mounting pressures.

First of all, we see here the official hostility against our Lord, brewing almost to a frenzy. If you go on to verse 6, read verse 6 in chapter 3 here, you will read these words. The Pharisees went out, that is out of the synagogue.

The Pharisees went out and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him. Mark this, to destroy him. Now it's as serious as that.

Following what took place on that occasion as described in the early verses of this chapter, following what took place in the synagogue, here you have the two most opposite communities in society, the Pharisees and the Herodians, joining hands together to destroy the speaker and the healer of that occasion. Now why is it that there is such hostility emerging against our Lord on the part of these people? I want to enumerate five things and I cannot say anything about them. Some of them we've, indeed most of them, we have said something about on previous occasions.

But I think they need to be seen now and seen together as making a picture. First of all, the Jewish leaders thought it blasphemous for Jesus to presume to forgive sins. This takes us back to chapter 2 verses 5 to 7. Who can forgive sins, they asked, when he forgave the sin of someone? Who can forgive sins but God only? And since they were unprepared to concede that he was God incarnate, then they were outraged.

Secondly, they were equally peeved that anyone claiming to be a religious leader in the Jewish tradition should be found in what superficially at any rate appeared to them to be a compromising position, as when Jesus feasted, sat down at a party with the profligates of the day, as we say with tax collectors and sinners, we ought to put it, with tax collectors and prostitutes. Thirdly, they were again mystified that one who claimed such a unique relation to God as he did even the God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob should not be teaching his followers to fast as the disciples of John were taught to fast and as the Pharisees fasted. How can you be in the line of the noblest tradition if you don't fast? You must fast.

Fourthly, that our Lord's nonconformity should go so far as to justify his disciples plucking heads of standing grain in the fields on the Lord's day and proceeding to eat them really added insult to injury. This to them was something utterly outrageous. And fifthly, Pharisee antagonism crystallized to a point of disgust and determination to join with their avowed foes, the Herodians, to silence him by hook or by crook, when he daringly and defiantly, and there is an element of defiance here, read chapter 3 verses 1 to 6, called the man with a withered hand out into the center of the stage, as it were, in the synagogue.

And even though there was no emergency, the man wasn't going to die overnight. It could have been left over until tomorrow. Jesus healed the man in the synagogue on the Sabbath day.

Now those are the main bones of contention. What we have here then is a veritable point of crisis in the ongoing ministry of our Lord. The rising hostility of the scribes and Pharisees now compels Jesus to quit the synagogues, very much like Wesley had to quit the church and go out and preach in the open air or before Wesley Wycliffe.

Jesus went out of the synagogues, and you see at this point that Jesus kind of leaves the synagogue behind. Maybe not totally, but He generally does. His policy henceforth is outside.

These verses, verses 7 to 12, seem to mark the decisive breach between the Lord and organized Jewry. This breach thus took place near the start of the ministry of Christ, and is quite as marked and decisive in the Gospels as in John's Gospel. Now, my friends, we need to see this.

Jesus did not proclaim the gospel of His kingdom and kingship very long before there was a break. Neither will you and I properly represent Him very far before somebody gets angry. Therefore, the first element in the mounting pressure is this.

It's the hostility of the Jewish authorities. Now, the second feature in the mounting pressure is the exact opposite, His general popularity. We read in verses 7 and 8 words which are almost breathtaking in this context.

Jesus withdrew His disciples to the sea, and a great multitude, and it is a great multitude from Galilee followed. Also, and you need to see the ongoing passage, also from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumaea and from beyond the Jordan and from about Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, hearing all that He did come to Him. Now, there are two great multitudes there, and if you've got a picture of a Palestine, ancient Palestine or modern Israel in your mind, I think you will see something of what's involved here.

It is simply a stupendous thing that is happening. The first multitude comes from Galilee. Jesus was in Galilee at the time, and there's a whole vast multitude of Galileans who've heard about His authoritative teaching and His ability to cast out demons and to heal the sick, and here they converge upon Him.

But there's another multitude, a very great multitude. So you have two multitudes converging into one. And the other multitude, oh if I could get this across this morning, they come from all over the place.

Mark mentions, for example, that some of them came from Jerusalem, which was a hundred miles to the south, and from Judea generally. Then he says there were people from further deep south again in Palestine from Idumaea, which is the modern Edom bordering on Arabia, the Arabian. So you have people here who've traveled a hundred to two hundred miles, not in a jet or a helicopter or by a car, but probably walking or sitting on the back of a donkey or what have you.

Neither is that everything. They came from the east of Jordan. We don't know where, but they came from that side of Jordan.

And not only that, they also come from right up north, northwest of Palestine, from Phoenicia's territory, specifying Tyre and Sidon on the Mediterranean coast especially. Now can you see what's happening? And it's already here. Mark chapter 3. Not Mark chapter 16.

Not during the last week in Jerusalem. It's already here. The scribes and the Pharisees are envenomed and they're determined to get rid of him.

And yet from all over the countryside, you have this milling crowd so that we have another danger here. The danger literally of our Lord being physically crushed. That word is used.

And so Jesus turns to his disciples and he says, look, get a little boat ready for me so that I can jump into the boat rather than be crushed by this multitude and from the boat I may be able to continue my ministry. You see the mounting pressures, the hatred of the minority of the leadership, the hostility, and then the popularity of the multitudes. There is a third element here and it's a very important one.

The demonical sensitivity that is shown in verses 11 and 12. And whenever the unclean spirits beheld him, they fell down before him and they cried, you are the Son of God. And he strictly ordered them not to make him known.

Now I am not going to say anything this morning in order to try and justify belief in demons and in evil spirits. We've done that on a previous occasion. We are taking the Bible at its face value this morning and I believe that when the Bible says that there are evil spirits, there are evil spirits.

When Jesus says so, I believe. And what you find here is this, whenever evil spirits saw Jesus, not once, not twice, whenever they saw him, at this point in time, you know what they did? They all said, you are the Son of God. Now mark what's going on.

The scribes and the Pharisees and the Herodians want to kill him. The multitudes want to crush him and get as near him as they can in order to be healed by him. They're not reflecting so much as to who he is or where he's come from.

The big thing as far as they're concerned is this, they want to be healed by him. They're not concerned with doctrine as I hear some people say today. It doesn't matter who he is if he brings us healing.

But I want you to notice what the demons say. You are the Son of God. They knew him and they confessed him.

Now I wish I had a whole hour for this. You see, the devil is never more dangerous than when he speaks the truth. I've learned that.

I hope you have too. The devil is never more dangerous than when he speaks the truth. Why do you think evil spirits were acknowledging that Jesus was the Son of God? Why did Jesus silence them? Why did he say, I don't want to hear you say it? I'll tell you.

They knew him to be their judge and the one who was going to mean their eternal downfall and damnation. They knew him and they recognized him as Lord of Lords and King of Kings, Lord of the underworld as well as of all things above. They recognized him and they too wanted to get rid of him.

Well how are they going to get rid of him? I'll tell you. In precise by falling in line with the purposes of the Pharisees, the scribes and the Herodians. You say how on earth are they going to do that? Well you see what they're doing.

By announcing at this stage that Jesus is the Son of God and popularizing it, they are aggravating the tension between Jesus and his enemies. And they are doing it at a stage before Jesus has been allowed to gather his disciples together to constitute them as an apostolate and to teach them what was necessary to teach them in order to establish the foundation of his kingdom and of his church. So you see, if these people had been allowed to go up and down the land shouting that Jesus is the Son of God and people believed them, as people believed in evil spirits, then we would have had a part of the world movement immediately to do away with Jesus on the basis of blasphemy.

Sovereignly he curbs them. He muzzles them and refuses to have their testimony. And that is the element that I want you to notice here.

The demonic sensitivity, but it is demonic and it is satanic even though the testimony is true. Now that brings us to the master plan. That much I believe is the minimum we need to see and have in our minds eye when we come to this epochal occasion in the outworking of our Lord's purposes.

Now verses 13 to 15. And he went up on the mountain and he called to him those whom he desired. Can you sense the sovereignty of the man of Nazareth? Can you see the kingly mean of Jesus Christ here? He goes up into a mountain and he from the mountain calls to him whom he desires.

He consults with no man, only with his father. He calls men to him as he desired them to come. And they came to him because he called them, sovereignly called them.

And he appointed 12. He didn't appoint them all. He called many to him out of those whom he called to him.

He appointed 12. And please notice, oh this is shorthand writing if ever there was shorthand writing. This is just a synopsis of the basic principles involved.

He appointed 12 to be with him. To be with him. To be with him.

And to be sent out by him to preach and to have authority to cast out demons. Now I have to summarize that this morning. I want us to notice three things.

First of all, the prayer that preceded it. Mark doesn't stress it. Luke and Matthew do.

Luke makes it explicit in Luke chapter 6 and verse 12 when he says, In these days he went out to the mountain to pray. And all night he continued in prayer to God. And then comes the choice of the apostles.

Moreover, Matthew records that faced with the same spectacle of the needy crowd, Jesus turns to them right at this point in time and he says, Look, he says, I see them as sheep without a shepherd. And my heart is saddened and I have compassion upon them. Pray that the Lord of the harvest will frost out workers into his harvest.

You pray. And then he spent his own night in prayer with God. Then comes this.

Now you say to me, Why are you stressing that? Oh, I'll tell you. I'll tell you. My reason for clearly pointing that out is this.

Though I believe that anything that Jesus said or did, he always said or did in fellowship with the Father. Whether he prayed before or after makes no difference. He was always in fellowship with the Father.

But it needed to be seen. It needed to be known that what he's going to do now, he is doing in concert with the Father in heaven and in fellowship with him that is unimpeded. The choosing of the twelve at that particular point in time was not the bungling of a mere man.

It was not the whimsical, impulsive reaction of someone who has become embroiled in bitter controversy. Controversy there is. I have given you a little bit of the background, the mounting pressures.

But what I want you to see is this. Jesus was not forced by the mounting pressures, as some liberal scholars suggest. Jesus was not forced by the mounting pressures to do something, as it were, on the spur of the moment that had no relation to the will of God or the eternal purpose.

He went alone. And as he alone sensed the Father's will and heard the Father's word, here together with the Father, it was determined that the moment had arrived to implement a plan which was eternal in origin, which the Father and the Son had determined before the world began. The prayer that preceded it, the project in principle, what is it? Well, in principle what we have here is Jesus now beginning to organize his kingdom.

Now, I'm not suggesting that there had been any disorganization up till now. Please don't misunderstand me. But it had been unorganized.

Jesus had said a lot about the kingdom, and he was going to say more about the church later on. He had said, for example, that the kingdom of God was at hand, right at hand, at your elbow, right there, right there. It's a remarkable thing, moving Jesus of Nazareth, moving among men and telling people, look, he says, the rule of God is right here at hand.

You can sense the power of God, the wisdom of God, the grace of God, the rule of God in grace and in every other sense. It's all embodied in me and is right here at hand. You've only to stretch out your hand.

You've only to make your request, and I will make known to you the kingdom and the kingship and the rule of the unseen God. That's all. Just do that.

It's among you. The kingdom is here because the king is here. He's announced that.

He's already told Satan that he's not going to compromise with him in order to possess the kingdoms of this world. Satan had a bargain to strike. But Jesus said, no, no, no, he says, even though it means a cross, I will go the way my Father chose for me.

I don't want the kingdoms of this world from your hands, even if you had power to give them. Jesus had already enunciated the fact that basically the kingdom of God belongs to the poor in spirit, the bankrupt in spirit. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of the heaven.

Now, however, Jesus sets about specifically to begin to organize that same kingdom by the appointment of its first ministers. Evidently, the unholy league of the Pharisees and the Herodians betoken to Jesus the utter and irremediable moral and spiritual condition of the Israel of his day. So much so that he now sets the foundation of the new Israel as it is to be constituted.

Oh, how it must have grieved our Lord's heart to do this, to move out of the synagogue and to leave the leaders of the Jews behind and show that there is a break and a start and a new beginning. Soon we shall hear him say words which were even more poignant, I'm sure, for him to have to say. I tell you, he says later to the Jews in Matthew 21, 43, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation producing its fruits.

And you don't turn over many pages of history until you hear the apostle Peter addressing a company of Jews and Gentiles, believers in Christ, believers in Messiah, and saying to them, now you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare, you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his own marvelous light. You are God's people. You see, Jesus is doing something very strategic here, something which is most far-reaching.

He's turning his back on apostate Israel, and he's setting the basis of the church which comprises Jews and Gentiles over which he himself sovereignly rules. Now Jesus follows here, of course, what he deems,

I believe, a prophesied pattern. He went up on the mountain and he called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him and he appointed twelve.

Why twelve? The choice of twelve is too significant to miss, I believe. Were there not twelve patriots? And were there not twelve tribes? There were. So also will there be twelve apostles in the kingdom of which he is king and which he is now beginning to organize.

We thus encounter continuity as well as discontinuity, or should I say, fulfillment of a prophesied pattern. Moreover, in line with this, I want to say not the only thing I can say further on it this morning, namely this. You turn over the pages of the New Testament and you come to the portrait you have in the book of the revelation of the New Jerusalem of the Bride of Christ on that latter day when we are entering into the eternal world.

The Bride of Christ is described as the city of God, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven to earth. You will notice that the name of the twelve tribes are written into the portals of the gates, but the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are written into the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. The twelve apostles of the Lamb are more basic and fundamental than the twelve tribes of patriarchs.

They were chosen in eternity, and their ministry is to be the basis upon which the whole New Jerusalem of the future, the whole age of ages, eternity, and heaven are altogether based. The twelve apostles of the Lamb. Let us make no mistake about it.

Jesus' action calling the twelve to be apostles was a very significant act. You see, the king is choosing his cabinet, and he's making a very distinct break with the past. And because of that, he needed to be sure that this was his father's will, and that it was his father's will now.

Now the other thing I want to say this morning, and perhaps the main thing I ought to say, remains the plan for that kingdom's prosperity. Jesus knew that men were after his blood already. He had come to die, and he knew that he himself was not here forever.

He knew the brevity of his own ministry. How can he expect his kingdom to thrive? Well, look at the picture. First of all, I want you to notice his choice of a nucleus of men to carry on the work.

Now rarely was our Lord's kingly mean more evident than on this occasion. Oh, if ever we see Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in all the self-consciousness of his kingship and sovereignty, my friends, it is here. Read these passages prayerfully.

He calls men to him, and then from among those whom he calls to him, he chooses, he appoints twelve. He does so as a king, as a sovereign. Behind their choice lay his kingly demands upon each of them.

In terms of time, leaving their avocations, leaving whatever they were doing, coming after him, dedication to his persons. And mark this, there was the willingness required of them to count themselves one with him whose death was already sought. Now these are still the terms of discipleship in some parts of the world.

You cannot become a Christian in some parts of the world today without being willing to die from the word go. But you see, it's not so with us. Whether it's a good thing or a bad thing, I know not.

I sometimes wonder. But right here, when these twelve disciples agreed to be the cabinet ministers of King Jesus, it meant this. They were putting themselves on the side of him who was already, already on the blacklist, and they wanted his blood.

But even so, if his kingly self-consciousness and sovereignty is anywhere seen, it is most surely in the kind of people he chooses to be the ministers of the crown in the new kingdom. Let me just give you one example. It's the classical one.

It's the one that stands out. He believes that he can gather this kind of people, these twelve different people together, and make them faithful, loyal, successful, fruitful ministers of his crown. And one of them was a traitor.

But the most remarkable thing in the midst of it is this, that he chooses such men as Simon the Zealot, as he's called, and Matthew the Publican. Now, we must not miss, you see, the significance of this. It's so easy to gloss over it.

We read our Bibles too fast. People want to read fast today and cover a lot of ground. You can't do it.

You can't take it in. Now, you know what you've got here? Who was Matthew the Publican? Well, Matthew the Publican was the man, he was a tax collector, who had been prepared to sell all his real spiritual heritage as a Jew to become a servant of Rome, a pagan overlord. He is what some of his friends would call a Quisling.

That's Matthew. That's Levi, or Matthew. Who was Simon the Canaanite, or the Zealot? Well, Simon the Zealot was on the very opposite extreme of society.

He was a man who belonged to a group, and they were prepared to kill, they were prepared for guerrilla warfare. This is quite ancient, you know. He was prepared to do anything and everything to get rid of the overlord pagan Rome.

So you see, you have absolute antitheses here, meeting in concert, in concord, in alliance to get rid of our lord in the first part of my text this morning. But now Jesus brings these opposites into the twelve, and he says, look, I'm calling you opposites, and I want to make you the ministers of my crown. Who but a king could do that? How can he do it? How can he afford to do that? I'll answer you in one word.

He called them to be with him, with him. And he knew himself. He knew his might.

He knew his grace. He knew his own capacity to transform the human heart, to take away the wretchedness and the antipathies and the sins and the whatnot, and to make new creatures and to blend the opposites in one man in Christ Jesus, the sovereign Lord. What then is to be the course of their training? Well, here it is.

It's all on the curriculum. It's all mapped up. It's all given us in these beautiful words.

He called them to be with him. That's all. No course in psychology, no course in philosophy, no course in theology so called.

None of these things that we place so much emphasis upon. I'm not saying that there's no value to them, but the one thing that Jesus wanted in order to constitute the twelve, the men he would have them be to receive his word and then that he might send them forth with the word and with power, is this, just let them

be with me. With me.

That's why he called them apart. Now, I am aware this morning that in the last analysis, the apostles had no real successors. They couldn't have, because they were there and they saw Jesus risen from the dead.

They accompanied him in the flesh, and in that sense, in the absolute sense, there are no successors to the apostles. But, it is nevertheless true that in principle, this is exactly the way in which Jesus calls those to his service who will continue the work that the apostles began. This is the amazing thing at the beginning of 1979.

Jesus calls momentities. Jesus calls men and women who are antipathies, who are at odds and ends among themselves. They just don't know where they are and that there are cross purposes and they're angry with one another.

They're poles apart and they've got very little gifts and they have no prestige perhaps in society and very little capacity to do anything big as the world counts big and great. And yet our Lord calls and he says the only thing I want you is this, come and be with me. Come and be with me.

With me. And then when I send you out, when I make you apostles, when I send you out, I'll send you out with my word of power and with my authority. Now we may argue about the gifts of the Spirit, whether they're extant in the 20th century or not.

My friends, don't let's be caught up with things that are not edifying from time to time at any rate. Listen here. If Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, and you and I live with him in this sense, I tell you when we go out into the world to do his will, it will be known that we have been with Jesus.

He will have molded us to do the job for which he's calling us. He will have imparted to us the necessary gifts and he himself will be with us. It doesn't matter where it is nor what it is.

He is Lord, you see. He's King. This is what encourages me about our visitation evangelism.

Everybody who is on the pilot scheme, every one of them have felt they can't do it. There is one who can make us able, ministers of the New Testament. He is able to make us able.

You come with me and be with me, with me. Now my very last word has to be this. This principle is continued on into the epistles of the New Testament.

I can only give you one illustration in closing. But lest you think that this is a principle that applies only to the original apostles, I want to disabuse you. Starting the first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul explains to the Corinthians, and some of them had been a bad lot, their sins as black as black could be.

But Paul tells them that they have been called into the kynomia, into the fellowship of Jesus Christ the Son of God. In the very first verse, I think, the first chapter, I think it's verse 5. Called into the fellowship of his Son. It's verse 9 I remember.

Now come into the second epistle of Paul to the Corinthians and he tells the whole community. Now then he says, we are ambassadors for Christ. As though God did beseech you by us, through us, in us.

You be reconciled to God, he says. We are his ambassadors. You see what's happening? Exactly what's happening here in Mark.

We are called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ to be with him. Always in touch, not letting anything come between us and him. Always assembling ourselves together when he is there with the twos or threes gathering in his name.

Coming to him at the morning, coming to him in the evening, coming to him on the Lord's Day, coming to him always with him. He's in the center. And what then? A sense of our ambassadorship, a sense of our high calling, a sense of our commissioning, a sense of our belonging to the kingdom that cannot be moved will come to us and we shall know that we have a place just because he is King.

Oh my friend, let's draw near to him today. I wonder whether some of us are but dimly aware of our Christian calling properly so called because we're so far away. And he called twelve that they should be with him.

Nothing else is necessary. He'll do everything else with him. With these thoughts in our minds, shall we turn now to the center of our gospel? Because you see, this is where it is all epitomized.

He died to make salvation and redemption possible. He commits to us the word of reconciliation and he bids us on the score of his great atoning sacrifice and his deserts to hand ourselves over to him. Let us sing prayerfully the hymn that has been appointed and it is found in the back of our calendar today, not in the book of praise.

It's not in our book of praise actually, it's not in the collection. Behold the eternal King and priest brings forth for me the bread and wine. Himself the master of the feast, his flesh and blood the food divine.

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