

## HE APPOINTED TWELVE, DESIGNATING THEM APOSTLES

Mark 3:1-19 (Key Verse 14-15)

*“He appointed twelve -- designating them apostles--that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.”*

In today's passage we are going to witness Jesus' appointment of the twelve apostles. Jesus did these, because of the great need of shepherds who will take care of God's flock with Jesus' love and compassion. Since the beginning of Mark's gospel, we have witnessed how people responded to Jesus, they crowded around Jesus as he preached the words of God and were greatly amazed, Jesus healed them from their diseases and demon possession. From Jesus they could experience love and compassion, they could be restored as people of God, unlike when they were led by the teachers of the law and the Pharisees who oppressed them with the law. The Pharisees' leadership drove people away from God and left them in darkness. But when Jesus came, he raised the twelve apostles, that they might be with him, learn from him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. Through the twelve apostles Jesus could establish the Christian church which continued to bless many generations, many wondering souls like me, and you till today.

Therefore, as we learn from the appointment of the twelve today, may God have mercy on us to receive one word. First experience the love and compassion of Jesus, be blessed by his word of authority, and be restored as a people of God. Secondly respond positively by faith to Jesus' call to be raised as his apostles for this generation according to his way, to fulfill the great need of shepherds in our generation.

The passage begins with Jesus who went to the synagogue, this was Jesus' usual place for he could meet many people there and preach the gospel. Now when he went to the synagogue in this instance there was a man with a shriveled hand who sat there among the crowd. A shriveled hand means the man could not use it, it was withered more like stroke on the hand, also the hand looked different, so he always kept it in his pocket for people not to see it. Because of the condition of the hand, the man had many challenges. He could not have a job like other men in construction, though he had the other hand he could not do many basic things like clapping his hands while singing songs in the synagogue. Also because of his shriveled hand people viewed him differently, they found him strange, they had pity on him and the likes and that bothered him that he could not be viewed and treated normal like other people. So having a shriveled hand was a life problem which he wanted resolved so that he too can be normal. He probably avoided crowded places because of his shriveled hand condition. But when he heard of Jesus who had power and authority to heal, he thought it was his chance also to be healed and so he went into the synagogue.

What happened when the man went into the Synagogue while Jesus was there? Let us look at **verse 2**: *“Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath.”* The man with a shriveled hand was desperately looking for help, that is why he came to the synagogue, he lived his whole life hiding his hand, with very low self esteem and limited in things he can do for himself, he could not even carry his groceries with ease. And when he came to the synagogue, the Pharisees used him as bait to trap Jesus. They did not care about the man, but rather they just used him, they sat there and watched Jesus closely to see if he would heal the man. They used the law of the Sabbath for their own selfish reasons. The Pharisees were called by God to take care of God's flock, to take care of people like the man with a shriveled hand, to encourage them and grant them hope with the words of God. And now when Jesus came, who had power and authority to free the man with a shriveled hand, they used the opportunity for their own selfish reasons, instead of praising God for Jesus who has power and authority. They wanted to use this situation to accuse Jesus of breaking the law of Sabbath.

Because of this behavior and lack of care for the people, the Pharisees drove many people away from God into the darkness. Because of the Pharisees' poor leadership, the people could not understand and experience the love and compassion of God. It is only when Jesus came that the people could taste and understand it, that is why the man with a shriveled hand could come to the synagogue when he heard about Jesus. Now how did Jesus respond to this situation? Let us look at **verse 3-4**: *“Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” 4 Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?” But they remained silent.”* Even though Jesus knew that the Pharisees were planning to accuse him, Jesus did not ignore the man with a shriveled, like a Shepherd he laid down his life for his sheep, he laid down his life for the man with a

shriveled. Jesus cared for the man; he had compassion on the man. The Pharisees were concerned about what they stand to gain from the situation, they were concerned about their political and power dynamics and completely ignored the needs of the man, even though they were supposed to be shepherds of the people, they were supposed to be shepherds to the man with a shriveled hand, they were supposed to encourage him with the words of God and care for him.

Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus said to the man with the Shriveled hand: *“Stand up in front of everyone”* and he said: *“Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”* Jesus was concerned about doing what is lawful on the Sabbath, while they Pharisees were concerned about doing what benefits them, they were concerned about money and power. We have learnt in the past that the Sabbath was created for the people, it was created to save lives, it was created to encourage and restore the lives of people like the man with a shriveled hand. And so Jesus asked the Pharisees, which is lawful to do on the Sabbath, to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to kill? And they remained silent. Why did they remain silent? They should have answered that it is lawful to do good, to save a life on the Sabbath. However, they did not answer Jesus’s question, they remained silent. In **verse 5** it says: *“He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts....* When they did not answer, Jesus became angry and deeply distressed because of their stubborn hearts. Their hearts were hardened, they did not humble their hearts but rather they were stuck on their own ways, even though the evidence was there, they insisted on their own ways. Because of this reason, they could not take care of God’s people, they were stuck on their own way of obeying the law, even though it oppressed the people, even though it drove people away from God. Because of this they could not be used by God, they could not be shepherds for God’s flock. In fact, their way of thinking, even drove them away from God, they were used by the devil to oppose the ministry of God, they began to plot ways to kill Jesus together with the Herodians.

What we see from the Pharisees, is nothing unfamiliar to our atmosphere today. Today as well we hear about many churches where leaders are just like the Pharisees, instead of serving the people with words of God, drawing them close to God and encouraging them, rather they are interested in the people’s money. Instead of doing what is lawful on Sunday, they are interested in coming out as those who have powers with fake miracles so that they can access the people’s money. Because of the focus on money and power, some even go to the extent of consulting witchcraft practices so that they can fill the church, make money, and become powerful. They became like this because they were stubborn, they were stuck on the idea of performing miracles instead of focusing on preaching the gospel and taking care of God’s sheep with love and compassion.

When Jesus saw this kind of thinking and stubborn hearts, he was angry and distressed. It is also interesting to note that Jesus has met many sinners, many people with various wrong doings, prostitutes, tax collectors and many others, but he was never angry and distressed, it is only when he saw stubbornness from the Pharisees that he was angry and deeply distressed. We need to overcome stubbornness, we need to have humble and repentant hearts to be used by God, otherwise we will go astray, and deep in the dark like the Pharisees. Furthermore, even though Jesus was angered and distressed by the stubbornness of the Pharisees, he still did not ignore the needs of the man with a shriveled hand, instead he said to the man: *“Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored.* Jesus the good Shepherd risked his life, he laid down his life for the man with a shriveled hand, for the Pharisees began to plot with the Herodians on how they might kill him. Even today, there might be many things happening, fake prophets, spiritual leaders who do not care about God’s sheep but only concerned about themselves, money. Know that Jesus is still working and just as he restored the man’s shriveled hand, he will make a way to provide for our needs.

After Jesus healed the man with a shriveled hand, he withdrew to the lake, there a large crowd from Galilee followed him. Furthermore, many more people when they heard what he was doing they came from all regions, Judea, Jerusalem, Idumea, and the regions across the Jordan and around Tyre and Sidon. They came to Jesus for he had something that they never heard of or experienced before, he taught the words of God with authority, he was filled with love and compassion for the people, he restored the people from spiritual blindness, he freed them from the power of sin and death and led them to repentance. That is why many more came in large numbers to him. When Jesus saw this large numbers, and thinking about the man with a shriveled hand and how he was treated by the Pharisees, he was deeply concerned. What then did he do?

Let us look at **verse 13-15**: *“Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. 14 He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15 and to have authority to drive out demons.”* Jesus went to the mountain to pray when he saw the gap between the need by the people and the availability of genuine Shepherds to take care of them. Jesus did not just make decisions, but he prayed to God, he always sought to do the will of God, he always humbled himself to hear from God, unlike the Pharisees who were stuck in their own way on how to fulfill the law.

After Jesus prayed, it says he chose those he wanted, and he appointed them as the twelve apostles. This was God’s answer to resolve the problem of many of God’s sheep who are in desperate need of Shepherds who will love them, care for them, have compassion on them, teach them the words of God and raise them as disciples of Jesus. Jesus appointed the twelve that they might be with him, meaning that they might learn from him on how to serve God’s people, Jesus wanted to raise the apostles to serve the people, just as he served them. Furthermore, Jesus called them that they might preach the gospel and have authority to drive out demons. Furthermore, it says he called to him those he wanted, meaning the apostles did not nominate themselves, but Jesus chose them because he wanted them. Who did Jesus choose as the Apostles?

Let us look at **verse 16-19**: *“These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter), 17 James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means “sons of thunder”), 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.* Jesus’ choice is very interesting, he chose fishermen who were not schooled, but ordinary men, he chose Levi the tax collector a public sinner, he chose Thomas who did not believe Jesus when he presented himself to the disciples after his resurrection, he chose Peter who did not have in mind the things of God, he even chose Judas Iscariot who betrayed him. Jesus chose all these men because he wanted them. Even for us today, when Jesus calls us is because he wants us, also Jesus’ choice is not based on some achievement of some sort but according to his choice. Furthermore, one thing that stood out in Jesus’ choice is that he did not choose the Pharisees. Why? He did not choose them because of their stubborn and hardened hearts, he did not choose them because when one is stubborn and refuses to repent and stuck in doing things their own way they cannot be used by God. They cannot be Shepherds of God’s flock, instead they will drive away God’s flock and lead them to darkness.

When I was at University, Sh. Lesedi invited to Sunday worship with my other friend Molefi, during that service they also invited us to a Bible conference. Thinking about schoolwork and a weekend away, I rejected the invite, at that time I thought church cannot help me with my life challenges and needs. However later that year I lived with Sh. Lesedi in his apartment and attendant worship service with him and Sh. Jacob. It was at that time when I began to see the heart of Jesus through him, he had compassion, love and care for me, something I have never seen before and something I never thought I needed. Later I also got to meet Sh. Rebekah and Jacob at their home, they were filled with love and compassion, they deeply cared for me and my wellbeing, they sacrificed their time and their home to serve me and raise me as a disciple of Jesus. They were God’s answer to take care of wondering sheep like me, God raised them as apostles for this generation, and since then my life changed so much. They were ordinary graduates from South Korea who could not speak English well, they did not understand the culture of African students. But Jesus called them, he wanted them to take care of God’s sheep in South Africa at Wits campus. And God used them mightily to establish Wits UBF which today is led by natives.

I pray that God may have mercy on us, help us to overcome the mindset of stubbornness, humble our hearts to be led by God according to his wisdom. There are many people today who are suffering from the life sin, they are suffering and yearning to be loved and taken care of, they are suffering and tormented by sin. God wants to use you and I to take care of them, to restore them. Let us repent from stubborn mindsets and allow God to use us to save our brothers and sisters.