

Mark 3:13-19

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[0 : 00] To begin with this evening, I have a bit of a confession to make. As I prayed into these two services today, I became more and more persuaded that the two passages that the Lord had laid in my heart were to be found in Mark chapter 3, verses 13 to 19, and Acts chapter 6, verses 1 to 7.

Now my dilemma was this. Which passage should I preach on first? And my confession is very simple. I'm still not sure that I've got them in the right order.

Some might argue that the call of Christ on the individual heart and life must inevitably precede the challenge to the church to meet the challenge of the wider world.

And therefore to be the courageous church that I believe Jesus wants us to be and that I spoke of this morning. And yet it may be that we need to focus our eyes on the reality of the kind of church Jesus wants us to be before, realistically, we can hear and understand the call of Jesus Christ to each of us to serve within that church.

I have been led as I have been led. And we can only leave the issue of it all to the Lord himself, who is, of course, sovereign over all things.

[1 : 47] For us in Scotland, the reality is that we have had an immense and a gracious blessing over the centuries, as the Lord has brought in different ways and at different times the gospel to these shores.

It's certain that in the early days of the Roman occupation of these islands, there were some in the ranks of the soldiers who had embraced the faith of Christ and who couldn't help but share that faith with our forefathers.

Then came Ninian in the fourth century to the shores of Whithorn, followed by Columba in the sixth century to Iona and his disciples at that point got as far as the east coast.

And so developed a very distinctive Celtic church, the effects of which still are being realized in our day. Of course, the most lasting impact of the gospel in Scotland was the Reformation under John Knox, then Andrew Melville, in the 16th and the 17th centuries.

And so was established the story, the reality of the saving grace of Jesus in our land. To the effect that this nation had the most sophisticated education and health systems in the world, and the most amazing missionary and later personal impact, maybe of any nation on the planet.

[3 : 29] A wag writing lightheartedly once put it like this. A linguistman decided to write a book about famous churches in the world, beginning with the British Isles.

He began in London. In his first church, he noticed on the wall a golden telephone with a sign that read, £20,000 per call.

He was intrigued and in further inquiry, the priest told him it was a direct line to heaven. And for £20,000, you could talk directly to God.

He travelled north to York and found the same thing. The golden phone with a £20,000 call charge. And so it was in Manchester, Liverpool and Carlyle.

He then realised he was close to the Scottish border. And he decided to continue his research here in Scotland. He came to Gretna. And sure enough, there was the church and there was the golden phone.

[4 : 37] But this time the sign said, £20,000 per call. He found the minister. And he explained how all over England he'd found the same golden telephone, but with a price tag per call of £20,000.

Why is it so cheap here? He asked. The minister smiled and said very gently, Well, laddie, you're now in Scotland. And it's a local call. A somewhat light-hearted story.

But such was the favour that the Lord poured out on our nation in days past. And such was the closeness our people felt to the things of the Holy Spirit.

But there's been a change. And we need to face it. And in some ways, go back to basics.

And in a sense, there is very little that is more basic than the call of Jesus upon our lives.

[5 : 44] And you know, I believe that that call still flows from the throne of the Lord to us in our day and our generation. And it's here that we need to find our new beginnings in Christ.

Yes, I and others can preach the Gospel. Yes, I and others can urge you to hear the call of Christ. To follow Him.

To trust Him. To confess your sinful life before Him. To repent of these sins. And receive from His gracious hand the fullness, the totality of forgiveness.

But that deal has to be covenanted between you and the Lord Himself directly. As the Spirit touches your heart. But we need to move on from there.

Because of this I am fully persuaded. That is but the beginning of the Christian life. Vital as it is. But we must move on into ministry.

[6 : 55] And to serve us. And to serve us. Not some of us. But the New Testament makes fear all of us. And we must come before Him. And listen for the call of Jesus.

It has ever been so. Let me be clear. And let me be clear. Individuals have a history of trying to resist the call of the Lord. Yes, even those who are our forefathers in the faith of the one true God.

Whom God Himself was to raise up to do mighty deeds in the ministry of His people. We see it, of course, in the call of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah. Jeremiah. I appointed you a prophet to the nations. Ah, sovereign Lord. I do not know how to speak.

I am only a child. And you can read the story for yourself. In the great book of the prophet Jeremiah. And then, as we read earlier, we saw it in the ministry of the mighty Moses.

[8 : 02] Moses says, God, my people have been in slavery for many years. Hundreds of years. Now you go. You go and tell the powerful King Pharaoh.

Let my people go. What a challenge. What a calling. What a responsibility. But then we get Moses' response.

First in Exodus 3 and verse 11. Me? Who am I? I am but a man. I can't do that.

And then he goes on to say, Who will I say is speaking? I don't know your name. God deals with it.

And Moses says, Yes, Lord. But what if they don't listen to me? And then we get the same excuse to be trotted out by Jeremiah and many others years later.

[9 : 03] I have never been eloquent. Chapter 4 and verse 10. And as each time the Lord deals with Moses' doubts and questions, ultimately in exasperation, Moses screams, Oh Lord, please send someone else to do it.

Chapter 4 and verse 13. When the call of the Lord comes to us, It's never easy to respond because of our own self-doubts, Our own limitations, Sometimes our own fear and pride.

And yet I believe that all of this can melt away when we fully understand the real way In which the Lord Jesus calls his followers into ministry.

And let me repeat again, The testimony of the New Testament is that every single one of us who are in Christ And who are embraced within his family, the church, Every single one of us has a very specific ministry within his body and to the world.

The world in which the body of Christ is set to serve. And when we understand the principles of the call of Christ as we find them in the Gospel of St. Mark, Then we are bound, first of all, to have our full confidence in Jesus, this Jesus, And we are faced with the simple decision to say yes or no.

[10 : 44] So let's see how Jesus did it. What I've always seen as the paradigm ordination service in Mark chapter 3, The call of Jesus.

And first of all we find that Jesus spends time in prayer. He spends time in prayer. I was delighted to read in your notices this morning, That just before the service from 6 o'clock, There was a congregational prayer meeting for the vacancy.

How desperately important that is. But I just wonder how many of you made it a priority to attend that. Well, as Jesus looked to call to him those he wanted to be his leaders, The leaders in his fledgling church, He first of all took time to pray.

But we learn a bit more about this incident in Luke's account of the same incident. It's to be found in Luke chapter 6 and verse 12.

But we read these words. One of these days, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, And spent the night praying to God.

[12 : 06] When morning came, He called the disciples to him. In human terms, Of course Jesus was a carpenter.

But in the fullness of who he was and is, His destiny was to be the saviour of the world. Indeed, The apostle Paul reminds us, In his letter to the church in Colossae, Verses 19 and 20 of chapter 1, That God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, And through him to reconcile to himself all things, For the things on earth are things in heaven, By making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

This is one who was the fullness of God. And yet he found it essential before settling his call on his people, To spend not just a few minutes, But a whole night in prayer to God.

My dear friends, We need to recover, The central significance, Of passionate prayer, In the life of the church, As we seek the call of Jesus, On our lives afresh, As individuals within that church.

I will remember, As a young boy, Living in the island of Lewis, At the time of the Duncan Campbell revivals, In the late 1940s, And early 1950s.

[13 : 47] The nation was still recovering, From the ravages of war. People were confused, As so many of the nation's young men and women, Had lost their lives.

And that included many, many hundreds, From the tight-knit communities, Of places like Lewis. And spiritual life, Was at that time, At a very, very low ebb.

And two elderly sisters, On the west coast of Lewis, Set about a regime, Of passionate prayer, Pleading with the living God, For their people.

And in the economy of God, Duncan Campbell, Who was set at that time, For some extended meetings in Ireland, Heard the call of Jesus, To go instead to Lewis.

And the rest, As they say, Is history. Another illustration, Of the power of prayer, That's, Is passionate and committed prayer, Is to be found in the, 20th century, In the far off land of South Korea.

[14 : 58] At the beginning of the 20th century, There was little, Or no, Evangelical Christian church, In Korea. And yet today, Some 25 to 30% Of the population, Of that nation, Are evangelical Christians.

The largest Methodist, Presbyterian, And Pentecostal congregations, In the world, Today, Are to be found in Seoul. With each congregation, Numbered, In its hundreds of thousands, Of members.

How did all this come about? Well, It seems it all comes down to prayer. Well, There were two, Significant developments.

First of all, Christians, Gathered in their own churches, In their thousands, Every morning of the week. From five o'clock in the morning.

And if you've ever heard Koreans pray, You know their passion. All of them pray out loud, At the same time. And secondly, Some of these churches, Actually bought, Sides of mountains.

[16 : 14] And their members, Repaired there, For extended seasons of prayer. Well, All of these people, Are following the example of Jesus.

In preparation to call his people, He spent a night, On a mountainside, In prayer. Where are you, In your spiritual walk, With the Lord Jesus Christ?

Are you content, That your life's work, Reflects what he is calling you to be, And to do? Well, Jesus is calling you, And he wants your response, The importance of prayer, In the call of Jesus.

The second thing is this, That Jesus extends, A specific, And a personal invitation. A specific, A specific, And a personal invitation.

He called to him, We read, Those he wanted. You see, The call of Jesus, Is never generalized. It's always personalized.

[17 : 29] Always specific. In this case, We get the twelve names, Identified for us, In verses 16 to 19. And as we read, The New Testament, We begin, To discover, What a mixed, And at times, Mortally crew, These men were.

Of course, Apart from Jesus, Iscariot, We learn that their lives, Were to grow in grace, As the years passed, And as they led, The church of Christ, With courage, And with faith.

But neither were they, Without their difficulties, And falterings. You see, The call of Jesus, While it may be a call, To ultimate perfection in him, Has to be worked out in, And through our weaknesses, While we live on this earth.

It is still true, That the glory of God, Is seen as his strength, Is revealed, In the weaknesses of his servants. And so it ever must be.

Again and again, We see, The record of how, The call of the Lord, Comes to each one of us, Specifically, And personally. The call came to Moses, From the heart of a burning bush, In Exodus 3, In verse 4.

[18 : 54] When the Lord saw, That he had, Gone over to Luke, God called to him, From the bush, Moses, Moses, Moses, At worship in the temple, We read in Isaiah chapter 6, Isaiah heard the call of God, And very personally, Very specifically, In verse 8, Then I heard the voice of the Lord, Saying, Whom shall I send, And who will go for us?

And I said, Here am I, Send me. And we've already referred, To the call of Jeremiah. And then, In the New Testament, The examples are numerous, Of Jesus the Lord, Speaking personally, And speaking specifically, By name, To those he calls.

And so it was here, On the mountainside. The men are there, They heard Jesus, Speak his call to them, And they responded.

I tell you again, From the scriptures, That every one of us, In the body of Christ, Has a call to ministry, On our lives. It may be, It may be, Word and sacrament, Or diaconate, Or eldership, Or youth ministry, Or pastoral care, Or teaching.

It may be, A whole diversity, Of Christian service, In the world. We're beginning, To understand, In new ways, The place of the workplace, In ministry.

[20 : 34] And how to bless, And how to bless, And release those, Called to serve there, For Christ, Both at home, And overseas. Amongst the most effective, Missionary challenges, Of our days, The call in the hearts, Of sun, To serve as, Politicians, Or teachers, Oil engineers, Or doctors, And so much else, In countries, That to more identifiable, Professed, Christian ministries, Are virtually closed.

The call of Jesus, Is personalized. Are you listening? Are you hearing? Are you responding?

And then in the third place, Jesus appoints them. He appoints them. We need to understand clearly, That it's the, Right of Jesus, And of Jesus alone, To appoint his people, To ministry.

It was such a joy to me, To read in this, Current church newsletter, Of your own congregation, Of the call to Dr. Actroyd. Of course, In formal church terms, The call goes from the congregation, To the prospective minister.

But it's clear to me, As I read, The appropriate section, Of the newsletter, That Dr. Actroyd, Is needing to satisfy himself, That the call is actually, From the Lord himself, And it's a call to his heart, Personally.

[22 : 16] Now to all, To some, All of this may seem, Pretty obvious, But it's not always, The way things are, In our churches. All too often, There are those, Who get into positions, Of responsibility, And feel, Almost, As if they've, Earned the right, To be there.

People, Who carry out, The tasks in the church, As if it were, A secular job of work. But the Bible is clear, In every case, Of authentic ministry, It is Jesus, Who first calls, And it is Jesus, Who ultimately appoints.

You see, To find, Real satisfaction, In our Christian life, We need to be contented, And satisfied, That we are doing, What we are doing, Because, We have heard, The call of Jesus, To us personally, And are appointed, By him, To our sphere of service.

And so the question is clear, For all of us, Do I know Jesus, Has called, And am I sure Jesus, Has appointed me?

And so finally, And fourthly, Jesus, In this passage, Makes clear, The purpose, Of all ministry.

[23 : 49] The purpose, Of all ministry. Here I believe, In this, Defining little passage, We get the divine, Shape, Of the church.

In other words, Once we are called, And appointed, Jesus shows us, What we are appointed for.

And there is, In my view, No exception. First says, Mark, We are appointed, To be, With him.

With Jesus. This is our, This is our, Deep joy, In our, Christian walk, And ministry. To be, With, Jesus.

In modern, Church life, I believe, That this covers, Two specific areas, Within our church. First of all, It is about worship.

[24 : 54] Worship, Is an essential element, In the life, Of every, Single believer. In the life, Of every, Christian church. You see, To be with Jesus, The risen Christ, Is automatically, To bow before him, In worship.

It is a mark, Especially, In the book of Revelation, That when the risen Lord, Appears, When Jesus, Makes himself known, People fall on their faces, In worship. And the second thing, About this, Is that, It is about fellowship.

Of course, There are many, Safe environments, Within church life, For fellowship, From the church hall, To the, Conference center, Or even to the dinner party.

But none, Can ever surpass, That sense, Of unity, And of fellowship, And of love, Amongst the people of God, Than when they come together, Focusing on the Lord Jesus Christ, In worship.

And so, Worship, And fellowship, Are two basic, Essential elements, In the life, Of a Christian. And it is a fallacy, A dangerous fallacy, To suggest, As some do, That you can be, A practicing Christian, Without being part, Of a living church family.

[26 : 23] But there is more, Yes, Appointed, To be with Jesus. But also, We read, That Jesus, Might send them out, With a double focus, To preach, And to have authority, To cast out demons, To drive out demons.

Now, Both of these elements, That Jesus defines, As essentials, Of a healthy church, Are under attack, In our day. There are those, Who argue, That preaching, Has had its day.

And there are those, Who deny, The existence, Of demons. Now, This is not the time, To debate, Either matter, But, What I believe, Jesus is teaching us here, Is that two, Essential elements, Of a healthy church, And a healthy, Christian life, Are proclamation, Speaking the gospel, And demonstration, Showing, The compassion, And the power of Jesus, To touch the needy.

And so, There it is, The shape, Of the church, The Christ, Shaped, Church, Enjoys worship, And fellowship, And engages, In proclamation, And demonstration, And the call of Jesus, Is to be part, Of such a church, Because, It is, Such a church, That changes, The world, And you know, We have to be, Radical enough, And bold enough, And courageous enough, To consistently be, Examining our own lives, And the life of our church, To make sure, To make sure, We conform, To the biblical shape, Of the church, Because, It is, First of all, Within such a church, That individuals,

Are most likely, To hear, The call of Jesus, And it is, It is also, Out of the love, And authority, Of such a church, That people are likely, To respond, To the call of Jesus, And so serve him, In the world, In Christian ministry, The call of Jesus, It is now, Nearly two thousand years ago, Since, That critical moment, On the mountainside, In Galilee, But what happened there, Sets down for us all, In every culture, And every age, These principles, From the life of Jesus, That must still dominate, The way we live, Our lives, And the way we do church, There has to be, A primary place, For prayer, As we consider,

[29 : 31] The call of Jesus, We have to hear, The voice of Jesus, Call us, And appoint us, Personally, And we have to do, All in our power, To be the Christ, Shaped church, That Jesus ordains, In worship, Fellowship, Proclamation, And demonstration, That is our responsibility, As we respond, Individually, And collectively, To the call, Of Jesus, Amen.