

With Jesus, imitating Jesus

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[0:00] So it's great to be carrying on in this series. We're in Mark's Gospel. We've been looking at it now for a few weeks. It'd be great for me as we're looking through it just to keep a finger in that passage in the Bible or have it open on your phone.

It's a great encouragement to me to know that. So we've been looking at Mark's Gospel in a few opening chapters. And here we enter at the middle of chapter 3, sort of a new time in Jesus' ministry where we see, as we read, he calls his 12 apostles.

But the question that I want to focus in on today is about, it's really the beginnings of the church, what we see here. And when it comes to thinking of the church, God's people, the question I want us to think about is what does it mean to be God's people?

What does it mean to be God's people? And not just that on a sort of a theoretical sense, but what does it mean to be God's people today? What does it mean to be the church today?

To think through that question, we need to understand what the church is, who we think the church is. There's lots of opinions, isn't there, about what the church might be.

[1:16] Is it a social gathering where you meet up once a week to see your friends that you haven't seen since the week before? Is it just a chance to chat and get the latest gossip?

Get to chat about what you've been doing? Is it a place you go to be encouraged? Is it the name of the building that God's people meet? And now that was a bit funny for us here because we meet in a bowling club.

But people refer to that, don't they? They refer to the place where God's people meet for a service as the church. I'm going to church. Is that right?

What is church? So this morning as we look at this passage, we're going to be thinking about what the church is, how it started, and how we're to live as the people of God as we look at the calling of the apostles.

And if you're not a Christian here this morning, if you're still looking into Christian things, this may give you an insight as you're thinking these things through or what it means to be a member of the church, a member of God's people, and to follow Jesus.

[2:17] And we're going to be thinking or considering the church, thinking about three things. That the church is reconstituted around Jesus. That's our first thing. The church is to be with Jesus, and then the church is to imitate Jesus.

It's reconstituted around Jesus. It's to be with Jesus, and it's to imitate Jesus. Just a quick reminder. You might be getting bored of me saying this because I've said it every week.

But I always remind us about what Mark's Gospel is all about. It comes from the first chapter, verse 1. Mark 1, verse 1. The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.

That is what Mark's Gospel is about. Everything fits under that banner. It's like the tagline. Or the script on the back of the book. This is what Mark's Gospel is about. Jesus Christ, the anointed King, the Messiah, who is the Son of God.

And it's all about learning about Him and what He has done in the world. So that's what it's about. That's what we've been doing about. And we're coming to this issue of thinking what the church is about.

[3:22] So our first point, the church is reconstituted around Jesus. Now I mentioned earlier that we might have lots of ideas about what church is, but the word church, it means gathering in Greek.

It's the word ecclesia. What this means is that the church is not a building that you go to, but the church is the people. It is God's people. Now the thing that we have to contend with is if the church is God's people, which it is, then what does that mean if the church is God's people?

What does that mean for God's people before Jesus came? What does that mean for the Israelites, God's chosen people that became the nation? It's a really important question because as we think that through, it helps us understand who we are.

It helps us understand what it means to follow Jesus and what that means in the church today. What we see in this passage, as Jesus calls the 12 apostles, is the very, very beginnings of the church.

You know that something big is happening in this passage because of what we read in verse 13. We read that Jesus goes up on a mountain.

[4 : 42] Just a hint for you. Whenever you read that something is happening, up a mountain in the Bible, it's always something big. It's always something dramatic that is going to take place.

You might remember Moses received the law and the Ten Commandments. He received it up a mountain. Always something big when you read up a mountain. Something big happens.

The church here, the very beginnings of the church. It's God's people, not to replace Israel by any means, but to reconstitute them around Jesus Christ.

And I don't know what you, when I hear the word constitution, my immediate thoughts, maybe they go somewhere different for you, to me, they make me think about the US, about the constitution.

A big word. When the United States of America was constituted as a nation, in 1789, it was created around a set of documents, a supreme law called the US Constitution.

[5 : 46] And as a nation, even today, many years later, America still operates around those documents around the US Constitution. It states how the federal government, the Supreme Court, presidency, Congress, how it's set up and how America is run and governed as a nation.

And in one sense, Israel is no different. It has an original constitution. When the living God, the Lord God, Yahweh, to give him his Old Testament name, constituted a people for himself, with him at the center and with God's law given to Moses at Mount Sinai.

Now, what I'm about to say is never going to happen, but I want you to imagine that the US decide to write a new US Constitution.

That is never going to happen. You can imagine the debate and the argument involving that would happen if they ever did. But just go with me on this. Imagine if they were to write a new Constitution. They would be reconstituting themselves as a nation. If they did decide to do that, if they did decide, they would have to decide things to keep, to continue, and things to stop, to discontinue.

[7 : 08] Jesus is here, as he calls the 12 apostles, is at the start of reconstituting God's people. There's some things that continue and some things that don't.

God's people, the Israelites, were originally constituted with 12 tribes, all named after the 12 brothers back in Genesis. and the Lord God chose these 12 to be the tribes to choose them to be his people.

The Israelites could trace their genealogy back to the tribe that their ancestors belonged to. And you see here, Jesus keeps that number 12. It is to show us and the people that there is continuity, but there is something new.

The 12 men represent the 12 tribes of Israel, but there's something different. There's something new. And notice with me, just notice with me, notice how he doesn't name himself as one of the apostles.

That's the same as what happened in the Old Testament when the Lord God, Yahweh, chose the 12 tribes in the Old Testament. He didn't make himself a tribe. What is Jesus doing?

[8 : 21] Jesus is putting himself in the same position as that of Almighty God. He has the same authority as God Almighty did to constitute a people around himself.

Jesus Christ has the same authority to reconstitute the people around himself. Because Jesus is God in the flesh. This is God himself.

The Old Testament people of God was a chosen people with God at the center and it's exactly the same here. The living God, Jesus, who came down from heaven, taking on a human nature, reconstitutes the people of God.

God, the continuity, is still at the center because of the people of God. What will become the church will be centered around him, centered around Jesus Christ.

Israel's not being replaced, but Jesus is doing something new. The church, the end times people of God in continuation with Israel are being established because a new era of salvation is dawning.

[9 : 29] There is a new covenant that will be written in Jesus' blood when he sacrifices himself at Calvary. And the church of God, the church of Jesus Christ will be established, flourish, blossom and grow with Jesus Christ at the center.

And you do realize, we do realize as we read this that this is our heritage. church, the choosing of these men is so pivotal in our history because it is through God working through these men that the church takes shape.

The apostles, they're still our apostles. Their office extends and is still valid today. That is actually different to a church minister because the church minister, his ministry sort of ends when either he leaves his charge or if he passes away.

But the apostles still have authority over us. They still have authority over us. They are envoys, missionaries sent out directly by Jesus, but they're still our apostles.

We still obey their teachings from the scriptures. We are the church here today.

[10 : 46] I just want to pause and say one thing just as a reminder. It's just as we read this, we might take things that were given to the apostles as the standard of Christianity.

It's just a reminder that we're not apostles. There is only ever 14 apostles ever chosen. You've got the 12, you've got Matthias who replaces Jesus, and then you've got Paul as well.

It's just a reminder that we don't have the same qualifications as these men, and neither should we expect to do all that they do. Standard Christianity, or what is expected in Christian ministry, is not gleaned entirely from looking at what the apostles were given or could do.

That doesn't mean there isn't principles and things for us to learn. However, these 12 men were uniquely and exceptionally gifted. Yet, that is not to downplay what Jesus calls us to do.

He won't call us to do it. It's a set number. But he does call us to be disciples. He does call us to follow him. He does call us to learn from him.

[11 : 58] So whilst the role of apostle and disciple might be different, there are principles that are true for both those apostles. And that's when I want to kind of, as we've thought about the beginnings of the church, that's kind of what I want to focus on in the rest of our time looking at this passage.

Two things that I want to focus on that are relevant with Jesus calling the apostles. And the two things that I want us to focus on is that they are with him and that they imitate him.

They are with him and they imitate him. So the first thing is that they are with him. You just look with me in verse 14 and we see that we read, he appointed twelve that saw that, or in order that they might be with him.

The twelve that he calls, they were not the only people who were following Jesus at that time, but they were selected from a larger group of disciples.

They were selected from this larger group to be apostles and they were selected to be with him.

Now we know, don't we, that the apostles in Jesus' time, that meant that they were to be where he was.

[13 : 21] It meant spending lots of time with him, physically present where they could watch him and learn from him and listen to him. And actually this is, it's really a signpost towards what God has been doing throughout the whole of history.

that the living God has always wanted to be with his people. He's always wanted to, or had a desire to dwell with them.

Throughout the entirety of God's history with his people, one of the themes that you see is of God coming down to reveal himself and dwell amongst his people. We've talked, we talked about the old constitution of the people of God, Israel, and what do we see there?

We see God coming down. He comes down on the mountain, then further on in Moses, he gives Moses the instructions of where he wants to be even closer to them.

He wants to dwell in the tabernacle, in the tent. He wants to be with his people and dwell in their midst. He then comes down and his glory comes into the temple later on because he's coming down to reveal himself and be in their midst.

[14 : 28] And now the living God comes down in the person of Jesus Christ. And upon reconstituting the people of God around himself, the first thing Jesus on calling them tells them that he's doing this, he's calling these twelve to be with him.

The very foundations, the beginnings of the church would be centred around the living God, dwelling, living, and being with his people. people. You know why he wanted that?

Because he wanted them to be in relationship with him. And we know that it's true in normal life, isn't it? That how do we grow in relationship with someone by spending time with them?

For those that are married, the way that if we get to know our friends, the way we get to know someone is by talking and listening and spending time with them.

You learn from them as well. As you hang out or catch up, if you spend, the only way that you grow in that way is if you spend time with them.

[15 : 41] If you never talk or never listen, over time the relationship you have with a friend will wane and if you let it, that relationship will drift apart.

And do we know that Jesus called each of us as disciples to follow him and one of the reasons is that he wants us to be, he wants to be with us. He wants us to grow in relationship with him individually but corporately as a body as we meet together.

He calls us today as Jesus is present with us by his spirit. He wants to be with us. But here's actually the mind-blowing reality.

The mind-blowing reality is that whereas Jesus was physically present with his apostles when he tabernacled himself with a human body and dwelt with them to be in this physical relationship, the mind-blowing reality is that today, he is closer to you than he was with them.

he's closer to you. Ephesians 3 that Christ dwells, Christ dwells in your heart through faith.

[16 : 55] He is with you because he lives in you. He lives in you by the power of his spirit. And if that's true, which it is, it stands to reason, doesn't it, that if Jesus calls you to be with you, that there is a purpose behind it, that in the same way that he wants a relationship with the apostles, he wants to have a relationship with you.

And the same rules apply to any normal relationship, that it is fostered and developed by spending time together. That he wants to actively converse with you through the pages of his words.

And he wants to actively listen to you when you bend his ear in prayer. He's with you. And he wants to be involved in the big things.

And the small things of your life, the joys and the sorrow. He wants to be with you so that he can show you what it means to follow him. He wants to be with you to encourage you when you're timid, beaten up, or discouraged.

But maybe also to pull you down a peg when you need to hear it. He wants to be with you to remind you he loves you unconditionally, no matter what, and that nothing you've done will ever take his love away from you.

[18 : 09] he wants to be with you to feed you spiritually, to remind you that you belong to him, that you're a child of God and a forgiven sin. He wants to be with you.

Okay, the second thing that I want us to focus on is that, so we've done the first one with Jesus, but the second one is that Jesus calls you to imitate him.

And I think this is actually slightly more subtle, the way that this comes across. Verse 14, we read, he appointed twelve, that they might be with him, and that he might send two things, he might send them out to preach, and to have authority to drive out demons.

There's two particular tasks you'll notice, he asks, send them out to preach and to cast out demons. But I just want us to look at the verses that come immediately before the calling of the apostles together.

In verse 7, we read that Jesus withdrew with his disciples to the lake, a large crowd followed. In verse 8, it informs us that they basically came from everywhere to see him.

[19 : 20] And then we get to verse 9, and we read, because of the crowd, he told his disciples to have a small boat ready for him, to keep the people from crowding him. Now, the important question in the middle of that, I think, is, which it doesn't say explicitly, is why did he need the boat?

Now, it could be for his own safety, but I want to make the case that it is because in numerous places in the Gospels, that is what he used a boat for.

In Mark 4, when he teaches the crowd by the lake, he stands in the boat away from the shore so that everybody can see him. He teaches from the boat.

It also happens in a separate incident in Luke 5. Jesus uses a boat when the crowds get too big so that he's away from them so that they're not crowded, so that he's free to preach.

The second thing Jesus does is he gives them authority to cast out demons. And this appears to model again what Jesus has been doing in the previous paragraph.

[20 : 31] Verse 11, when the impure spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, you are the son of God. So, when we read this 12, it seems to follow directly from the paragraph that just comes before because what Jesus calls the apostles to do mirrors what he's just been doing in the paragraph before.

To teach and the demons fall into him. He's calling the apostles to imitate his ministry with what he's been doing up until now. He's calling them and appointing them to imitate him to carry out his ministry.

And as the apostles were sending them out, no doubt, they were called to represent him in a sense. They would point towards him and they would point that the reconstituted people have gone, Jesus at the center.

This is what it was all about. we know what it means for people to imitate. As I was talking to the children just there, but I noticed that they didn't say that they were ever imitating their parents, which was quite comical.

But the truth is we know that that is the main people in their lives that they imitate. Sometimes that can be embarrassing. If they do things or say things, you often catch them repeating phrases that you've said to them for good or bad.

[22 : 02] But with good or bad results, children know how to imitate those that are either teachers or friends, but particularly parents.

this is the one that we're called to imitate. This is the one that we want our children to imitate. And this is the one that Jesus wants his apostles to imitate.

And we realise, actually, that God's people in the old constitution were supposed to do exactly the same. as God's people lived out God's laws, his laws of love, they were to do that to represent him to the surrounding nations.

We read in Isaiah 49 that they were to be a light to the nations, to the Gentiles. In one sense, that has not changed.

The church with Jesus at the centre was to be a light to the nations by bringing the message of Jesus Christ to the nations. And it is through the apostles that this would happen.

[23 : 13] It is through their written accounts that it is still happening. And as we in the 21st century, it is exactly the same. We're to imitate Jesus.

Now, we're not called, as I mentioned before, to do the same thing as the apostles. For one, nothing is to be added to the scriptures. We can't add to it.

We are called to imitate him. We're called to love him, which Jesus did. We're called to explain the reason we have hope. We're called to explain and tell people that they need to turn away from sin and put their trust in the king who defeats sin and death.

We're called to be light in the darkness. We're called to be salt and light in the community and the neighborhoods which God has placed us. That our lives point to the Savior.

we should be attractive and distinctive. The most loving thing that we can do for anyone is to tell them they need to be perceptive from a spiritual mess that they've made and that Jesus is the answer.

[24 : 26] Jesus himself said, I've come to proclaim freedom to the captives. He is the light to the nations succeeding where Israel failed, of which our life should all point to him.

the church, God's people, is to point to him, where to imitate him, and represent him, be his ambassadors to a dying world, where to be with him, and where to imitate him.

So as we come in for landing, we've looked at three things. Church is reconstituted around Jesus Christ. It's not blessing Israel, but it's continuing on that the church is to be with Jesus, and that Jesus is with us, that he's given us his spirit, he's called us, his tabernacle, his tent, he lives with us, and he wants us to grow in relationship with him by hearing his word, and by bending his ear in prayer.

And then finally, where to imitate him, where to look to him, to follow him, the way he lived, and the way he did things, to be his ambassadors to a dying world, to be attractive and distinctive soul and life, so that people see our lives and know that there's something different, but wonderful, because we've been called and adopted by God the Father to follow our King.

What a wonderful thing it is to know the privilege of what it means to be God's people, to what it, as we read this here, that this is our heritage, this is our history, that we are the same today, that Jesus is more present with us than he was when he called them.

[26 : 05] That is a staggering thing to behold. Jesus lives with us and empowers us by his spirit to do the difficult task of imitating him, to be a light to the nations.

Let me pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Almighty God, we do praise you once again for everything that you've done.

Everything that you've continued. We are reminded this morning of what it means to be church and how you have established the people of God.

And we look forward to the day when the church will be gathered to your people of the multitudes around the throne and worship you from every tribe and tongue and nation where you will be our God and we will be your people and you will dwell with you perfectly in total harmony.

We have hope for that day. As we look forward to that day, that day in the form of our present, that we live in anticipation of that day, living knowing that you are with us today and imitating you today.

[27 : 25] Help us, Lord. We come to you knowing that that is impossible, but we know that when we ask, you give us those things, that we receive those things.

When we ask for bread, you don't give us a rock. And so we ask that you bless us and equip us and send us out to live and work for your praise and glory.

We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen.