

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)
Mark 03: 13-19

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord! It's time to read the Bible again. Today, we will continue to read from Mark chapter 3, from verse 13 to verse 19.

Jesus began His public ministry only after John the Baptist was put in prison. With Capernaum as the center, He first called five disciples: Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Matthew. The scope of His ministry was in the region of Galilee, lasting for about a year. Jesus preached, cast out demons, and healed the sick. His fame spread throughout the entire land of Israel. Not only did large crowds come to throng Jesus, but the Pharisees, scribes, and Herodians also determined to eliminate Him.

Jesus came to the earth with the most important mission of bringing the kingdom of God to the earth. As Jesus Himself declared in Mark 1:15, there are two important steps to bringing the kingdom of God to the earth. The first is the passive aspect, which is to accomplish redemption and solve the problem of human sin; that is, Jesus had to die on the cross, and this step had already begun to be set in motion. The Pharisees had already joined hands with the Herodians to prepare to eliminate Jesus.

The second aspect is the positive aspect: He wanted to train His disciples to carry on the work of the gospel, continue to seek the people of the kingdom of God, and begin to establish the prototype of the kingdom of God, which is the church. By this time, Jesus had been ministering for more than two years. In addition to the five He had already called, there were also some disciples who often accompanied Him. With only one year and four months remaining, it was necessary to begin intensive and strict discipleship training. First, He had to determine the candidates. Today's passage from verse 13 to verse 19 lists the 12 disciples appointed by the Lord.

Let's read through the passage once: "And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him. Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons: Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, 'Sons of Thunder'; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him."

The names of these 12 disciples appear a total of four times in the Bible, including once here in Mark's Gospel, and the second occurrence is in Matthew 10:1-4. In that passage, verse 2 specifically points out that these 12 disciples are also the 12 apostles. While disciples signify they are learners who follow Jesus, apostles denote authority; they are the ones sent out by Jesus to do His work. Thus, the identity of these 12 individuals initially is that of disciples, which later transforms into apostles. In Mark 3:13-18, Jesus is indeed selecting them as disciples, and then He begins active discipleship training. By Mark 6:7, we see Jesus calling the 12 disciples, sending them out two by two, and granting them authority over unclean spirits. In verse 6:7, they officially become apostles, sent out by Jesus to work. So, the period between 3:12 and 6:7 is when Jesus provides the initial discipleship training, followed by sending them out, somewhat akin to an internship.

Another instance where the names of the 12 apostles are mentioned is in Luke 6:12-16. Particularly in verses 12 and 13, it highlights Jesus going out to pray on a mountain, spending the whole night in prayer to God, and only in the morning does He call His disciples, selecting 12 from among them, calling them apostles. This passage emphasizes Jesus's preparatory work and how He chose these 12 individuals. The third mention of the names of the 12 disciples is in Acts 1:13. At that time, Jesus had already risen from the dead and ascended into heaven, and Judas, the betrayer, had already died. The remaining 11 disciples gathered in Jerusalem at Mark's house, praying to God and deciding to appoint another to replace Judas, namely Matthias, to maintain the number of 12 apostles. With this background, let's proceed to read verse by verse.

Verse 13: "And He went up on the mountain and called to Him those He Himself wanted. And they came to Him."

From the Gospel of Luke, we know that Jesus first went up the mountain alone at night, away from the crowds, and spent the entire night in prayer. This was a significant event. I believe Jesus meticulously prayed, one by one, before the Father, considering carefully in the Spirit, as He had to spread the Gospel to the ends of the earth and establish the kingdom of God on earth. This span of time would be over two thousand years, and it could not afford interruption, unprecedented in human history. It was an immensely daunting task. Jesus did not choose the most intelligent, capable, or resourceful elites. Instead, He selected individuals from the lower strata of society. Among them was Judas Iscariot, who would betray Jesus. I believe Jesus spent much time with Judas, not for His sake, for He knew deeply that He must fulfill redemption, sacrificing His life, but for Judas himself, who would be lost forever after betraying Jesus.

For the selection of these 12 men, we see the Trinity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit together, after a night of consideration and weighing, and when morning came, they had a unanimous decision. The record in the Gospel of Mark is very simple, that Jesus called people to Himself as He desired, because after this thorough prayer and fellowship, the Father's will is the Holy Spirit's will, and the Holy Spirit's will is Jesus' will, so Mark here emphasizes that Jesus called people to Himself as He desired, emphasizing that the Trinity has absolute sovereignty in the matter of election.

According to Luke's account in the Gospel, many disciples came to Jesus, and Jesus chose 12 people from among them. As the Bible says, "For many are called, but few are chosen" (Matthew 22:14), The selection was a decision made by the triune God after a whole night of communication and consideration. This is completely God's sovereign authority, not based on man's determination, not based on man's effort, not based on man's consideration or man's earnest request. The responsibility on man's part is to willingly and gladly agree; since God has chosen, God will take all the responsibility.

Verses 14-15: "Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons."

After selecting the 12 people, Mark says here that He appointed 12 people. The verb for "appointed" in Greek is "poieo," and the noun form of this verb is "poiema." The meaning of "poieo" is all about work, but this is not ordinary work. "Prima" is the origin of the English word "poem." This word is also used in Ephesians 2:10, where it implies that we are God's workmanship. Translate it as "workmanship" in the Chinese Union Version is not a good translation. This work is like a poem; it can be said to be God's masterpiece, God's representative work, God's proudly created work. Mark uses this word to say that He appointed 12 men, expressing that in the selection process, Jesus carefully appointed these 12 men as if creating a masterpiece.

We know that in the Old Testament, Israel had 12 tribes, and they were God's chosen people in the Old Testament. Originally, the kingdom of God was given to the Israelites, but the Israelites rejected the Savior Jesus. Just as it is said in Matthew 21:42-43, "The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing," Then in verse 43, Jesus says, "Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it."

It was because the Israelites rejected the Savior Jesus that Jesus called 12 apostles anew, wanting them to go and find the people who can bear fruit and to establish the kingdom of God. We know that 12 is an eternal completeness. After Judas betrayed the Lord, he was lost, and they chose Matthias instead, still making up the 12 apostles. These 12 apostles represent all the saints of the New Testament, just as the 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament represent all the saints of the Old Testament, until the new heaven and new earth, when the holy city New Jerusalem descends from heaven.

In Revelation 21:12, we see that the New Jerusalem has 12 gates, and on the gates are written the names of the 12 tribes; the 12 tribes of Israel in the Old Testament

are the gates of the earthly Jerusalem. Then in verse 14, the wall of the city had 12 foundations, and on them were the names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb. It turns out that these 12 apostles, whom Jesus carefully selected and appointed, are to continue in their positions forever.

After Jesus chose them, He had three tasks for them: first, they were to always be with Him. So, the first task was directed towards the Lord, because time was short. These twelve disciples were to live and work with Jesus every day, building an intimate relationship with Him. Dwelling with the Lord was a prerequisite for being sent by Him. It's the same today, if you haven't built an intimate relationship with the Lord, He won't send you out to work. You must first dwell with the Lord, allow Him to work in you, and when you've reached a certain point of maturity, when you can hear His voice, then He can send you out to work for Him. After this step, what you do may not necessarily be what the Lord primarily wants you to do.

The second step was to send them out to preach, and the audience was people. Preaching was the most important task for Jesus on earth. Similarly, He sent out His disciples, and the most important task was preaching. So, what is the message? In fact, the message is a person, it's Jesus Christ, and you are to preach Jesus Christ as the gospel. The deeds of Jesus Christ are recorded in the four Gospels, so why send people out to preach about Him? Because what is preached is not just an objective gospel, but the subjective experience of each commissioned person with the Lord Jesus Christ, and such subjective experiences are to become their testimony. That is, every commissioned person is to become a witness for Jesus Christ.

The third step was to give them authority to cast out demons. The power to cast out demons comes from God's authority. Whoever the Lord sends, He gives them authority, making them representatives of the Lord, able to act in His authority, even commanding demons to obey.

These three steps are sequential, one step following the other. First, you must be with the Lord, building an intimate relationship with Him, then you can understand God's will and the trust He has given you. During this time, God wants to prepare you first. When you are prepared, then the Lord will send you. Such a sending is

marked. With the Lord's commission, you have His authority and the ability to cast out demons.

Jesus appointed the twelve apostles, and over the past two thousand years, essentially all saints have been generated through the twelve apostles. They indeed inherited the ministry of Jesus on earth and fulfilled the commission Jesus gave them. Each one of them is a great spiritual person. If you think they were all naturally noble, intelligent, and capable, then you are mistaken. Now let's see who they were.

Verses 16, 17, 18, 19: "Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, 'Sons of Thunder'; Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him."

Previously, we mentioned that there are four passages recording the 12 apostles. If you compare these four passages in detail, the names recorded are the same, but the order is different, and the description of each person is slightly different. It is very special that in these four records, Peter is ranked first, Philip is ranked fifth, and James the son of Alphaeus, or commonly known as James the Less, to distinguish him from James the brother of John, is ranked ninth. The first, fifth, and ninth are the same person, so this naturally divides the 12 disciples into three groups. The first group consists of two pairs of brothers: Peter, Andrew, James, and John; the second group is Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas; and the third group is James the Less, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot.

Now, let's look at them group by group. In the first group, all four were fishermen, among whom John and Andrew initially followed John the Baptist. Later, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and was introduced by John the Baptist. They got to know Jesus and stayed with Jesus for a night. The next day, Andrew excitedly found his brother Simon to meet Jesus. Jesus immediately changed Simon's name to Peter, which means stone. Peter was the oldest among the 12 disciples. He was

straightforward, had a frank personality, and was even a bit impulsive. In the Gospels, there are the most records about him. The most important thing should be in Matthew 16:18. When Jesus asked the disciples, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered with revelation from the Father, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus was very excited when He heard this and added, "And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock, I will build My church." The meaning of Peter is stone, and the church is built on the rock. Objectively speaking, this rock is Christ, and subjectively speaking, it is the Christ realized in the disciples.

In addition to Peter being the stone for building, in verse 19, Jesus also told Peter that He would give him the keys of the kingdom of heaven, so Peter holds the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, after Pentecost, he preached a message in Jerusalem and opened the door of the gospel to the Jews, bringing in about three thousand people to be saved. Later, in the house of Cornelius, he also opened the door of the gospel to the Gentiles. He not only holds the keys of the kingdom of heaven, but in his later years, he wrote 1 and 2 Peter. In 1 Peter 2:5, he further tells every saint, "You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (NKJV). Peter was later crucified upside down by Nero in Rome and martyred.

Then there are the two sons of Zebedee, James and John. Jesus gave them the name "Sons of Thunder," which suggests their fiery temper. Indeed, in Luke 9:52-56, it is recorded that when the Samaritans did not receive them, they asked Jesus if He wanted them to call down fire from heaven to destroy them, resulting in Jesus rebuking them. But why mention this seemingly negative nickname in the Gospel of Mark, and why share it between these two brothers? James was the first of the twelve apostles to be martyred. This is recorded in Acts 12:1-2, where Herod Agrippa began to persecute the church in Jerusalem, starting with its leaders. Although the Bible does not record any significant deeds of James, he was the first apostle to be martyred for the Lord. He was also the first mature witness for Christ because a martyr is a witness. His martyrdom was like a flash of lightning across the sky, witnessing to the glory of God and foreshadowing the martyrdom of the other ten apostles, none of whom were spared except John.

John, on the other hand, was another "Son of Thunder." Among the twelve apostles, he was the youngest and lived the longest, being the only one who did not die a martyr's death. John was the disciple whom Jesus loved the most. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, John was the only disciple who remained by His side. He also accepted Jesus' commission to take care of His mother, Mary. This commission transformed John, who was naturally hot-tempered, into an apostle of love.

After the other apostles who worked with him had all been martyred, he began to fulfill his ministry. God used him to write the Gospel of John, loudly proclaiming that Jesus is God. He also wrote the three epistles of John, declaring that love is the way of the church, and authored the book of Revelation, loudly proclaiming the second coming of Christ. He sent forth thunderous warnings to the corrupt and fallen world; indeed, he was a Son of Thunder.

Mark first mentioned Peter, James, John, and finally Andrew. Andrew's special gift was his ability to bring people to Jesus. After meeting Jesus himself, he immediately brought his brother, Simon Peter, to Jesus. In the example of feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish, it was Andrew who brought the boy with the five loaves and two fish to Jesus. During Jesus's final week on earth, when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and the people welcomed Him with palm branches, some Greeks also wanted to see Jesus. It was through Andrew's introduction that they were able to meet Jesus. Later, Andrew preached in Turkey and was martyred there.

The second group of four apostles—Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas—were all personally chosen by Jesus. Bartholomew is likely the Nathanael mentioned in John 1:45. Philip and Nathanael were good friends. After Jesus was baptized by John, Philip returned to Galilee and met Philip, calling him to follow Him. At that time, Philip's understanding of Jesus was limited, but he was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah prophesied in the Old Testament. He immediately went to tell his friend Nathanael. Nathanael, who was familiar with the Old Testament, replied skeptically, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" But Philip persisted and invited Nathanael to come and see. When Nathanael saw Jesus, he believed

and proclaimed, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Nathanael spread the gospel to Armenia and was martyred there.

Matthew was originally a tax collector, despised by the Jews. However, upon being called, he immediately left his lucrative profession and followed Jesus, eventually becoming the author of the Gospel of Matthew. He spread the gospel to Ethiopia and was martyred there. Thomas was a rational person, demanding evidence for everything. On the Sunday evening after Jesus's resurrection, when Jesus appeared to the disciples, Thomas happened to be absent. Later, when the disciples testified to Thomas about seeing Jesus, he did not believe, saying, "Unless I see in His hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe." Eight days later, Jesus, full of grace, appeared again to the disciples, and this time Thomas was present. Jesus said to Thomas, "Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing." Thomas immediately confessed, "My Lord and my God!" Though his belief came late, people still call him "Doubting Thomas." Yet, it was this Doubting Thomas who brought the gospel to India and was martyred there. Today, you can still see churches in India commemorating Thomas.

The third group of four apostles—James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot—all had strong political and patriotic fervor. The term "Zealot" means "fanatic." The Zealots advocated armed resistance against Roman rule. In their quest to overthrow Roman authority, they resorted to violence and even assassination against Roman officials and Jews collaborating with Rome. The Zealots were somewhat akin to today's terrorists, and Simon was associated with the Zealots. And Matthew, the tax collector, was precisely the type of Jewish tax collector whom the Zealots despised the most.

Thaddaeus and James the Less, though not explicitly labeled as Zealots, were also passionate Jewish nationalists. The Bible doesn't provide much detail about these three individuals. However, given their background, after being called, they were able to live alongside tax collector Matthew, share meals with him, and demonstrate their transformation. All three of them later went out to preach.

Simon brought the gospel to what is now England, and he was later martyred while preaching the gospel in Persia. Thaddaeus brought the gospel to Turkey and was also martyred in Persia. And James the Less brought the gospel to what is now Egypt, where he was martyred.

The last one, Judas Iscariot, was likely the only one among the twelve apostles from Judea. He was from Kerioth, as Mark specifically notes, "Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Him." He, too, was a zealous political nationalist. His motives for following Jesus may have been different from the others. While the other three experienced transformation, Judas seemingly did not change. He had a penchant for stealing, and Jesus appointed him as the treasurer, perhaps hoping that through managing the money bag, Judas might have a change of heart. Despite repeated reminders from Jesus, Judas remained stubborn.

After betraying Jesus, he hanged himself, truly becoming a son of perdition. Unlike the other three in the same group, who, upon believing in Jesus, experienced a transformed life, becoming martyrs for Christ and offering a beautiful testimony. Dear brothers and sisters, in the latter days, as the day of Jesus draws near, He is still calling people to follow Him, to be His disciples. Are you willing to be a glorious witness for the Lord like these apostles?

Let's pray together: Lord, thank You. You choose people not based on their background, abilities, or status, but on their willingness to obey and faithfully follow. Grant me such a heart and mindset, willing to rise up as a witness for You in the last days. Bless our church with a group of sincere and devoted saints who are willing to respond to Your call, to establish Your church in our community. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.