

THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Mark 3

The connection with the last lesson is easily made through the teaching in regard to the sabbath. Draw from the classes first what the Lord said about the sabbath and what its true purpose is, and then use the miracle in the beginning of today's chapter as an illustration.

Doctrinal Points

The Lord sees to it that everyone receives enough truth to save him if he tries to live according to what he learns.

The Word produced the church, not the church the Word.

Faith belongs to the understanding or thought plane.

Charity belongs to the plane of the heart or will.

Selfish motives in the heart destroy charity, no matter how many outwardly good deeds a person may do.

Notes for Parents

In our chapter for today we have an opportunity to see how different kinds of people reacted to the Lord's presence and teaching. We are apt to think that if we had been in the Holy Land when the Lord was on earth, we should certainly have loved and followed Him. But would we? Everyone certainly did not. The scribes and Pharisees resented Him so bitterly that they said that it was the devil from whom He got His power, and they even plotted against Him with their own avowed enemies, the Herodians, who approved of the Roman rule. The Lord's own family thought He was "beside Himself"—crazy—and wanted to force Him to stop His work. The crowds were so much more interested in being healed of their diseases than they were in what the Lord taught that He had to have a ship at hand in which He could get away from them if necessary. Only a very few people really followed Him to learn

the truth He came to teach. In which group would we have been?

We can answer this if we ask ourselves honestly in which group we are today. Do we, like the scribes and Pharisees, try to silence the voice that tells us we ought to be kinder and more faithful than we are? Do we, like the Lord's human relatives, think the Lord's teachings are too impractical to believe in? Do we, like the crowd, follow the Lord only for what we can get out of it for ourselves? Or do we, like the true disciples, put the Lord first in our thinking and in our lives and try to learn more and more of what He would have us do?

It was from these true disciples that the Lord chose twelve to be His apostles, to go out into the world after He should leave them and carry the Gospel—the good news—to all people, thus founding the Christian Church.

Primary

After your introductory story, read verses 7 to 20 of our chapter, and talk about the twelve apostles. Teach the children the names of Peter, James, and John. Read the names of the others two or three times so that the names will become familiar. Tell them why they were called *apostles* and what their work was to be. They should also know which ones wrote books of the Bible.

Do you remember how in our lesson for last Sunday we read the story of the man who was sick of the palsy? This was only one of many diseases which our Lord healed when He was living in the world. Such great crowds came to Him to be healed that He often had to go away from them. Our chapter for today begins with the story of how He healed a man who had a withered hand. Because He did this on the sabbath His enemies tried to make trouble for Him. The Lord was never afraid of His enemies. He could always either shame them into silence or else leave them.

Where did He go to escape them?

What did He ask His disciples to provide for Him?

Where did He go to teach His disciples?

How many of them did He ordain to go out and preach?

What powers did He give them?

See how many of their names you can remember.
Which ones have we heard of before?

You will hear very often about the twelve apostles. Their names are given in this chapter. Let us read how the Lord chose them. [Read Mark 3:7-19.] We know most about Peter and James and John. See if you can remember these three names and remember that this was a different John from John the Baptist. These three were the Lord's closest followers and were often taken with Him when the others were not.

Do you know what *disciple* means?

It means "a learner."

The twelve special disciples whom the Lord ordained came to be called the apostles, because *apostle* means "one sent forth."

They were the ones who were to go out into the world after the Lord left them and begin the Christian Church.

Three of them—Peter, James, and John—were closer to the Lord than the others.

He often took them with Him when the others did not go.

Which two apostles were chosen to write Gospels?

John was also the one to whom the revelation was given which is described in the last book of our Bible.

Junior

Give this class as much information as is available about the less-well-known apostles, having them look up and read all the references. They should understand the importance of these twelve men in the beginning of the Christian Church.

What miracle of healing did we learn about in our last lesson?

Who were the scribes?

Who were the Pharisees?

Why did they hate the Lord?

Of what did they accuse Him?

What did the Lord say about new wine?

What did He mean?

What did He say about the sabbath?

You remember that wherever the Lord was He always went to the synagogue on the sabbath day. Our chapter begins, as the last

one ended, on the sabbath, and the scribes and Pharisees are still standing by to see how they can find fault with the Lord.

What miracle does He perform in the synagogue?

What did He ask the scribes and Pharisees?

Then we are told that He withdrew to the seashore and that He asked His disciples to have a small ship at hand in case the crowd became too great. Read Mark 4:1. You remember that the first four disciples were fishermen; so they had boats at their disposal. The people crowded about the Lord in such great numbers that He often had to withdraw from them. In addition to the seashore another favorite place from which the Lord taught is mentioned in our chapter. Read verse 13. Perhaps you remember the sermon on the mount. Read Matthew 5:1. In the Bible many important things happen on mountain tops. This is because going up on a mountain is a picture of lifting our minds above the plane of worldly thinking and drawing closer to the Lord. If you have ever been on a mountain, you know how small everything down below looks and how far you can see. That is the way this world looks to the Lord and the angels, and it is good for us to get the “angel view” of things sometimes. One of the best-loved of the Psalms (Psalm 121:1) teaches this lesson. You remember that the commandments were given from the top of Mount Sinai.

Who were the first four disciples called by the Lord?

What other disciple did we learn about in our last lesson?

A *disciple* is a “learner.” Now we read that the Lord ordained twelve of His disciples to receive special instruction from Him so that they could go out and preach. They have come to be called the twelve apostles, because the word *apostle* means “one sent forth.” See if you can learn the names of all twelve. Three of them—Peter, James, and John—were the Lord’s closest followers and were taken with Him sometimes when the others were left behind. Andrew was Peter’s brother, one of the first four.

The next four are Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas. Philip came from Bethsaida, a village near Capernaum

at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee. You may read about his call in John 1:43, and if you will read on a little, you will find that Philip brought another disciple, named Nathanael, to the Lord. It is thought that Nathanael may be the personal name of Bartholomew, for Bartholomew means “the son of Tolmai,” and this name is not mentioned except in the lists in which all twelve are named. So this disciple might easily have been Nathanael the son of Tolmai. Matthew we can remember from the story of his call, which we had in our last lesson, and also because he was the writer of the first Gospel. To fix Thomas in your mind read John 20:24-29. Sometimes people today call a man who is hard to convince a “doubting Thomas.”

Then there is another James, who is referred to sometimes as “James the Less” to distinguish him from the brother of John. He later became a great leader of the early Christians, having charge of the first church in Jerusalem. The disciple called Thaddaeus in this list is elsewhere called both Lebbaeus and Judas “not Iscariot” and is said by Luke to be the brother of the second James. He wrote the Epistle of Jude. Simon the Canaanite is sometimes called Simon Zelotes, and so was apparently one of a very strict sect called the Zealots. And finally there was Judas Iscariot, who became the betrayer of the Lord.

What powers did the Lord give the apostles?

The last part of our chapter teaches us a lesson which we all need. Verse 21 tells us that the Lord’s “friends,” when they heard the attention He was attracting, “went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself.” And verse 22 tells us that the scribes and Pharisees said that His power came from the devil. The same thing happens today. When one of our friends starts out on an entirely new course which we do not understand, we are very apt to think he is “crazy.” And when someone we dislike does something very good, we are sure that he must have some bad motive behind his act. We are all too ready to think what we like to think instead of finding out what is really true. And in verse 29 the Lord teaches us that this is very dangerous. It is from this verse

that people have come to speak of the “unforgivable sin.” To “blaspheme against the Holy Spirit” is to be unwilling to acknowledge truth which condemns our evils. It is unforgivable only because it closes our minds to the truth and so makes it impossible for the Lord to reach us.

The last five verses of our chapter sometimes puzzle people, but this is because they want to think of the Lord just as a good man. The Lord was God Himself come into the world and to Him all men and women were equally dear. He wanted to help everyone, but He could come close only to those who were good.



Intermediate

Stress the correspondence of the twelve apostles as a whole and of Peter, James, and John in particular. The difference between a disciple and an apostle can be taken up as it relates to our own activity. We need to be both.

Our chapter for today is very closely connected with the last one. You remember that the Lord told the scribes and Pharisees that the sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath, and immediately He had an opportunity to illustrate what He meant. For in the synagogue itself on the sabbath, He finds a man who needs healing, and He asks the scribes and Pharisees, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?” The same story of the man with the withered hand is told in Matthew 12:9-13, and there He also asks them if they themselves would not rescue one of their sheep which happened to fall into a pit on the sabbath day. The Pharisees could not answer Him, because again they knew He was right; but they went out and “took counsel with the Herodians” against Him. This shows how bitter and determined they were, for the Pharisees and the Herodians were enemies. The Herodians were a political group who supported Herod and favored the Roman rule, while the Pharisees, as we have seen, hated the Roman rule.

The withered hand has a similar correspondence to the palsy, for the hand is always the symbol of power—we carry out most of

our intentions by means of our hands. The man with the withered hand pictures those who, for lack of proper spiritual nourishment, have lost the power to do good. The good people in the Lord's time were in this state, and the Lord's teaching and example restored this power just as He restored the man's hand.

The Lord was in the habit of teaching by the seaside and also on a mountain—you remember the sermon on the mount—because the sea pictures knowledges gathered in the memory, and a mountain pictures an elevated state of thought.

Read Mark 4:1. This shows why the Lord asked His disciples to have a small ship at hand. You can see that most of the people who “pressed” upon the Lord to touch Him wanted to be healed of particular diseases and afflictions. The Lord taught such people by the seaside because He can help each of us only through what truths we have in our memories. Whenever we see that there is something wrong in what we are feeling or thinking or doing (this is spiritual disease) the Lord in a secret way brings up in our minds something we have learned from the Word which helps us to understand our fault and overcome it with His help. But then He went up into a mountain and called to Him “whom He would.” A great many people want to live good lives and get rid of their faults, but they do not all want to think deeply about the Lord and His truth. The ones whom the Lord calls up into the mountain are those who want to lift their thoughts above the plane of worldly things and learn all they can about heavenly living. These are the people who are concerned not only with being good themselves but with bringing the Lord's truth and healing power to others. It was those who went up into the mountain with the Lord who could be sent out as His apostles.

The word *apostle* means “one sent forth.” *Disciple* means “a learner.” There were twelve apostles because the number twelve signifies “all things in a complex” or all the things which go together to make a whole. The twelve apostles, like the twelve sons of Jacob, picture all the qualities of faith and love which make a whole person, a person capable of loving, knowing, and serving the

Lord. So each apostle represents some particular quality in us. We cannot consider them all, but we should know about the three who were closest to the Lord—Peter, James, and John. You remember that in every one of us, as in the Lord, there is a trinity, the trinity of will, thought, and act. We would never do anything if we did not have some desire which prompted us. We cannot carry out any desire without thinking about it and learning how to do it. And we are never satisfied until our desire and thought are carried out into action. In the church faith and charity are common terms. Faith belongs to the understanding or thought plane, and charity belongs properly to the plane of the heart or desire. Sometimes people think of charity as just outward good deeds, but these are merely the carrying out into act of charity in the heart. The Lord says that our outward good deeds are not really good at all when they are done, as they sometimes are, from selfish motives like the desire to seem good and to be praised. Peter, James, and John represent the trinity in us: faith, charity, and the good of charity.

The apostles were those who, after the Lord left them, went out into the world and founded the Christian Church. Judas was the only one who did not serve the Lord in this way. We shall learn more about him later.

Basic Correspondences

a mountain = a high plane of thought
Peter = faith
James = charity
John = the good of charity

Senior

The lesson of the unforgivable sin should be discussed with this class and the importance of an attitude of openness to the truth even when it condemns us.

The question which the Lord asked the Pharisees in the synagogue, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?” carried on the teaching about the sabbath in our last week’s lesson. The Pharisees could not answer it, and

the Lord then healed the man whose hand had been withered. We know that the hand corresponds to the power to act. Things wither when they are deprived of the necessary nourishment, especially water. The scribes and Pharisees had come between the people and the Word, cutting off the supply of truth which they needed. So they had lost the power to live good lives. The common people were like the man with the withered hand. Note the fact that the Pharisees went out and “took counsel with the Herodians” against the Lord. This shows that they recognized that they had no legitimate means of silencing Him, for the Herodians, the political party who favored Herod and the Roman rule, were normally regarded by the Pharisees as enemies.

There is an interesting contrast presented in this chapter by the Lord’s teaching the multitude by the seaside and then going up into a mountain to give special instruction to particular disciples and to commission the twelve apostles. The sea represents knowledges gathered in the memory. The Lord sees to it that everyone has the opportunity to receive into his memory sufficient truth for his salvation, if he chooses to obey it. But not all care to know more than the bare essentials of a good life. Those who want the truth not for their own salvation alone but that they may serve the Lord and the neighbor as fully as possible are pictured by those who were called up into the mountain to the Lord.

The twelve apostles, like the twelve sons of Jacob, represent “all things of faith and love,” all the qualities in us which enable us to know and serve the Lord. The three closest to the Lord—Peter, James, and John—represent faith, charity, and the good of charity, the three essential elements of a good life, goodness in the mind, heart, and outward act. The other nine are subsidiary qualities, all good and useful in their proper place—even Judas who, representing the ancient Hebrew nation, pictures the interest in the externals of worship. It is only when the externals are placed in a position of first importance and observed without a true internal that they become perverted. The apostles, with the exception of Judas, were to go out into the world, after the Lord left them, and found the

Christian Church. They were men of different talents and different characters, but the Lord saw in each one capabilities which fitted him for his task. We should note, however, that the power each one had was from the Lord, and that the Gospel they were to preach was from the Lord, not their own. The Lord's life and teachings were the foundations of the Christian Church. The apostles were not the authors of the Gospels. The facts were drawn from their minds and arranged and expressed under inspiration from the Lord. The Word produced the Church, not the Church the Word.

As the Lord's fame grew, His kinsmen from Nazareth, who thought of Him only as one of themselves, were disturbed and said, "He is beside himself" (that is, crazy). We tend to doubt the ability of anyone whom we have known in childhood and youth to become a really great person. And the scribes said, "By the prince of the devils casteth he out devils." When one we dislike does great things, we are all prone to try to read some bad purpose into his seeming good works. The teaching in this chapter is that we should cultivate the habit of judging good and truth impersonally, and ask of any statement not, "Who said it?" but, "Is it true?" and of any deed or project not, "Who began it?" but, "Is it a good and useful thing?" Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which has come to be referred to as "the unforgivable sin," is unwillingness to recognize as truth from the Lord anything which condemns our own evils. When we are in this attitude it is impossible for the Lord to reach and help us. So we go on confirming evil in ourselves, which is the road to hell. Humility is the only ground in which the seeds of truth can take root.

The Lord's seeming indifference to His family, described in the last few verses of the chapter, should be considered in connection with their purpose in coming as described in verse 21. The Lord knew the hearts and minds of all men then as He knows them today. We come into relationship with the Lord only as we keep the commandments because they are from Him. This is the thought which is expressed in the last verse of our lesson.

Adult

You will find that many of the adults will actually know very little about the twelve apostles and will be interested in such details as you can give them. In general, discussion should center on the various ways in which the people of the Lord's time reacted to His presence, and their counterparts in the life of today.

The Lord's life and teaching in the world accomplished the consummation of the ancient Jewish dispensation and the beginning of the first Christian dispensation. The scribes and Pharisees were the official spokesmen of the decadent church, and throughout the Gospels their attitude toward the Lord is one of stubborn and willfully blind rejection. It is interesting that in verse 5 of our chapter for today the word translated "hardness" is actually "blindness." Blindness of heart is the rejection of the truth by the selfish will. It is the "unforgivable sin" of verse 29. Again and again the charges of the scribes and Pharisees were countered by the Lord with such unanswerable truth that they could not argue. But in each case their opposition to Him was increased. In our chapter they "went forth, and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against Him, how they might destroy him." The Herodians were a political party which supported Herod and favored dependence upon Rome. They were enemies of the Pharisees. So a joining of forces with the Herodians was an acknowledgment by the Pharisees that they had no legitimate means of silencing the Lord.

The state of the common people at the end of this dispensation is pictured by the man in the synagogue whose hand was withered. The hand is the symbol of power. Whatever the physical cause of the man's affliction may have been, the use of the word *withered* involves in the spiritual sense the result of a lack of truth. It is lack of water which causes things to wither, and water corresponds to truth. The people had been deprived by the scribes and Pharisees of the truths of the Word. They had lost the power to do good because they did not know what was good. In Matthew 23:13 we read, "But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye

shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.” The man in the synagogue is a picture of those who were devout and really desired to be able to live good lives.

Another class of people—the most numerous perhaps—is represented by the multitude who “pressed” (literally “rushed”) upon the Lord at the seaside, desiring only to be healed of their diseases. Even in the natural sense, these people were thinking of themselves, not of each other or even of the Lord. They recognized their wretchedness and sought relief wherever it was promised. The Lord healed and taught these people by the seashore, a picture of how He is able in the Church universal of any age to lead men to better states by recalling to their minds whatever of truth they have stored in their memories. Verse 11 expresses a truth which is illustrated in several places in the Gospels—the truth that the hells and evil spirits cannot stand in the presence of the Lord. This should teach us that when we are struggling with a temptation, our ability to resist the evil will come only as we admit the Lord into our thoughts.

Then the Lord went up into a mountain and called unto Him whom He would. Those who are called to go up into the mountain with the Lord are those who want more than to be saved from suffering and disaster themselves. They really want to learn of the Lord and serve Him. The Lord found among this group His apostles, men in whom He saw the capacity to learn and also to transmit what they learned to others. Even here we should note that it was He who gave them all the power they had. After the Lord left them, the apostles did go out into the world and establish the Christian Church. But the Gospel they preached was the life of the Lord, and the miracles they performed were done in His name and by His means. One of the most subtle fallacies of our times is the assumption that the beginnings of the Christian Church and the Gospel records of the life of Christ were simply products of the minds and deeds of the apostles. Many conclusions of some modern theologians can be traced to this false premise, and we

need to be able to recognize its influence and to discount such conclusions accordingly.

The twelve apostles were all different. Like the twelve sons of Jacob they represent “all things of faith and love in the complex” (AC 9643⁴). The particular correspondence of Peter, James, and John is given us a number of times in the writings: “faith, charity, and the good of charity” (AC preface to 2135) or “truth in the understanding,” “truth in the will,” and “truth in act” (AE 444¹¹). AE 821³ gives the correspondence of Andrew as “the obedience of faith.” The difference between Andrew and John is probably analogous to the difference between the good of truth and the good of love. AE 740⁸ says that Judas represents the ancient Jewish nation.

None of the other apostles is discussed specifically in the writings, but an interesting study could be made of them from the little we learn of each from the letter of the Word taken in connection with the correspondence of the sons of Jacob. Philip, whose home was at Bethsaida, is mentioned several times in the Gospel of John, first as bringing Nathanael to the Lord (John 1:43-46), then in connection with the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:7), then as a means of access to the Lord for “certain Greeks” (John 12:20-22), and especially in the incident in John 14:8-11, when it is Philip’s request, “Show us the Father,” which brings forth the Lord’s clearest statement of His identity. Bartholomew, which means “son of Tolmai,” may possibly have been that same Nathanael of John 1:47-51, since the name Bartholomew appears only in the lists of the twelve, and Nathanael, whose home was in Cana of Galilee, is included with several of the apostles in John 21:2 when the Lord appeared to them after His resurrection beside the sea of Tiberias. Thomas has come into our common speech as “doubting Thomas” because of his slowness to believe in the Lord’s resurrection (John 20:24-29), but we should read also John 11:16 and 14:5. The second James, James the son of Alphaeus, is often referred to by commentators as “James the Less,” but he became after the Lord’s resurrection a great leader of the early Christians,

the head of the Church in Jerusalem. Thaddaeus is the surname of Lebbaeus (Matthew 10:3) and is identical with “Judas the brother of James” in the list in Luke 6:16. He is the Judas “not Iscariot” of John 14:22 and the writer of the Epistle of Jude. Simon the Canaanite is also called Simon “Zelotes.” This means that he was a member of the Zealots, a fanatical sect who worked especially for the overthrow of the Roman rule and the re-establishment of a theocracy.

An interesting thought is presented to us of the New Church by the statement in TCR 4: “It is a noteworthy fact that some months ago the Lord called together His twelve disciples, now angels, and sent them forth throughout the spiritual world, with the command to preach the gospel there anew, since the church that was scarcely a remnant of it survives.” From this we may presume that all twelve became angels. In the letter of the Word (John 6:70) the Lord Himself speaks of Judas Iscariot as a devil. But Judas the man who, when he found that the Lord actually was taken prisoner by his means, tried to return the purchase money in order to release Him and, finding that impossible, went out and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-10), evidently had in him the basis of salvation like all the others.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Apocalypse Explained, n. 820²: “Peter was the first of the apostles because truth from good is the first thing of the church; for, from the world a man does not know anything about heaven and hell, nor of a life after death, nor even about God. His natural light teaches nothing except what has entered through the eyes, thus nothing except what relates to the world and to self; and from these is his life; and so long as he is in these only he is in hell; and therefore, that he may be withdrawn from these and be led to heaven he must needs learn truths, which teach not only that there is a God, that there is a heaven and a hell, and that there is a life after death, but also teach the way to heaven. From this it is clear that truth is the first thing through which man has the church. But it must be truth from good, for truth without good is mere knowledge that a thing is so; and mere knowledge does nothing except to make a man capable of becoming a church; but this is not effected until he

lives according to knowledges. Then truth is conjoined to good, and man is introduced into the church. Moreover, truths teach how a man ought to live; and when man is affected by truths for the sake of truths, which is done when he loves to live according to them, he is led by the Lord, and conjunction with heaven is granted him, and he becomes spiritual, and after death an angel of heaven. Nevertheless it is to be known that it is not truths that produce these effects, but good by means of truths; and good is from the Lord. Because truth from good, which is from the Lord, is the first thing of the church, Peter was the first to be called, and was the first of the apostles . . .”

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- J. What did the Lord do first for the man who was sick of the palsy?
forgave sins
- J. What did the man have to do himself? *rise, pick up bed, walk*
- J. What disciple was called in our last lesson? *Matthew (Levi)*
- J. What faults did the scribes and Pharisees find with the Lord? *ate with sinners, disciples didn't fast, broke sabbath*
- P. What did the Lord say about new wine? *needs new containers*
- J. What did He mean? *old ideas and new truth don't go together*
- J. What did He say about the sabbath? *made for man*
- P. In our lesson today what miracle of healing was performed? *withered hand*
- J. Why did the scribes and Pharisees object to it? *sabbath, challenged their authority*
- J. With whom did they plot against the Lord? *Herodians*
- P. Where did the Lord go to talk to the multitudes? *seashore*
- P. Where did He go to teach His disciples? *mountain*
- P. How many did He choose to be apostles? *twelve*
- J. What powers did He give them? *preach, cast out demons*
- J. Name as many of the apostles as you can.
- J. What did the Lord's family think about what He was doing? *thought He was crazy*
- J. Where did the scribes say His power came from? *the devil (Beelzebub)*
- S. What is the "unforgivable sin"? *rejecting truth that condemns our evils*
- S. Why? *makes it impossible for the Lord to help us*
- I. What did the Lord say when He was told that His mother and His brethren were looking for Him? *Whoever does the will of God is my mother and brother . . .*
- I. Why did He seem to disown them? *because He knew why they came*