

New Hope Sermon 11/4/18 "Called to be with Him"

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I'd like to start with this true story.
It's called Why Go To Church?

A church goer wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and complained that it made no sense to go to church every Sunday. "I've gone for 30 years now," he wrote, "and in that time I have heard something like 3,000 sermons. But for the life of me, I can't remember a single one of them. So, I think I'm wasting my time and the pastors are wasting theirs by giving sermons at all."

This started a real controversy in the "Letters to the Editor" column, much to the delight of the editor. It went on for weeks until someone wrote this clincher: "I've been married for 30 years now. In that time my wife has cooked some 32,000 meals. But, for the life of me, I cannot recall the entire menu for a single one of those meals. But I do know this. They all nourished me and gave me the strength I needed to do my work. If my wife had not given me these meals, I would be physically dead today.

Likewise, if I had not gone to church for nourishment, I would be spiritually dead today!" GCFN 10 25 18

So let's pray for the Holy Spirit's nourishment as we consider Jesus' relationship to the disciples and to us.

Two weeks ago we looked at the growing rumblings of discontent between Jesus and the Pharisees. This was in Mark 2 and the beginning of 3 – the beginning as well of the Jesus's new disciples' commitment to follow Him. We looked at how hard it would be as new, vulnerable disciples to find ourselves at loggerheads with the powerful religious establishment that was quizzing Jesus and quizzing us on each way Jesus broke their ceremonial law. It's important that we understand this, beloved, because it is NOT easy to take a full commitment to Jesus amidst a culture and prominent people who deride our Master and deride all His followers. We not only have Satan against us, but we have much of the secular society against us as well.

But in that context, I want us to notice Jesus' care for his followers in three ways: 1. He had their back. 2. He called twelve of them as Apostles to be with Him. 3. He gave them His authority to teach and cast out demons. Kingdom authority as His ambassadors.

I. Jesus had their back

Someone once said: "A real friend's got your back, while the fake ones are sticking knives in it." Our real friends are the ones we treasure, aren't they? I think 'having one's back' gives security and sense of freedom. We can be who God created us to be and even though there will be misunderstanding and criticism from others, our real friends help us face the problems and keep moving forward – because they have our back.

In team sports that's the only way players can get ahead. In football or lacrosse, particularly, when a player has the ball and is advancing down the field, the defensive players on his or her team are always running alongside, watching for those who are trying to take the player down and tackling or checking them before they can down our teammate. For example, fullback Mack Strong blocks for Seattle's Quarterback Ricky Watters, and Watters depends on him. "Mack does all the dirty work in the run game. He does everything. I mean, if the goal posts fell, I wouldn't be surprised to see him go over there and hold them up." *Larry Weisman, "All-Joes honor fullbacks for dirty job well done," USA Today (12-16-02)*

When Jesus has our back, He is helping his own followers succeed in ways we never could if He was not there as our Protector and Defender. Satan is always trying to trip us up and he works through people as our

protagonists – like the Pharisees were in Jesus’ day. Switching back to Mark’s account, let’s see how He did that.

In Mark’s account ch.2 the opening story is Jesus forgiving the sins of the paralytic. It was quite a scene, as the paralytic’s friends lowered him down from the roof so he could be in front of Jesus. Verse 5 says “*When Jesus saw their faith (the faith of the friends) he said to the paralytic “Your sins are forgiven.”* Although most of Jesus’ new followers were tradesmen, they were religious Jews and those words must have shocked them. They incensed the Pharisees, who began to think to themselves: “*He’s blaspheming. Who can forgive sins but God alone? V.7* An awkward situation for the young disciples, to be sure. Yet Mark notes “*Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit what they were thinking and answered them directly: That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...I tell you, the paralytic Take up your bed and go home. And immediately he was healed spiritually and physically.* Wow – quite a comeback and lesson for the new disciples.

After the call of Levi, a tax collector who had the notorious reputation of an extortioner and traitor of his own people, the Pharisees aimed one of their critical barbs at the disciples, not Jesus. They asked the disciples pointedly “*Why does Jesus eat with tax collectors and sinners?”* Mk.2:16. Jesus overheard that question and answered himself: *It is not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have come not to call the righteous but sinners.”*v.17 I doubt his new followers would have been able to come up with such a wise answer – that silenced the Pharisees for the moment. When the Pharisees came after the disciples, Jesus was there to defend and protect them.

It is of great encouragement to us to see the ways Jesus protected his followers and spoke for them in their newly established faith. Without His nurture and work as their Teacher and Lord, they would have become spiritually dead. They did not become casualties of the Pharisees’ power plays and vitriolic opposition because He had their back.

We need to do that for one another too. Sometimes by protecting and defending. Other times by applauding and affirming others. This true example brought tears to my eyes: “The deaf child, former NFL star Kenny Walker, felt like an outsider. As Kenny matured, however, he compensated for his deafness with great physical prowess. His larger-than-normal frame, extensive knowledge of football, and intense focus attracted the attention of his high school football coaches and, later on, many powerhouse college coaches. When Kenny's high school coach asked him where he wanted to play college football, he signed "N" for Nebraska, a team he had always dreamed of playing for. Nebraska's coaches immediately signed him and made arrangements to have an interpreter present at every practice and game.

Kenny was so successful at Nebraska that he made All-American and was named Big Eight Conference "Defensive Player of the Year." But the crowning moment of his college football career came during his final home game. Traditionally, senior players were introduced alphabetically and ran onto the field, welcomed by a cheering crowd. But because Kenny was deaf, the university and local community plotted a unique way to praise Kenny. In a special article, the *Omaha World Herald* showed the fans how they could sign an ovation: they could stand, hold their hands above their heads, fingers spread, and then wave both hands from side to side.

When Kenny stood in the stadium tunnel, he felt the vibration of the cheering crowd as each senior before him ran out on the field. But when he ran out on the field, he felt no vibrations. Puzzled, he stopped and looked around the stadium to see over 75,000 fans standing for him, waving their hands in a way that only a deaf person would recognize as an applause.”*John G. Hubbell, "Kenny Walker Listens with His Heart," Reader's Digest (October 1993), pp.191-98* We can have other people’s backs that way, too.

Point #II. Chap 3: Jesus calls the Twelve

In chapter three, Mark records more of Jesus' teaching and healing ministry – all of which the disciples witnessed. V 7-12. His popularity is obviously growing as people heard “of all he was doing” Large crowds now gathered around him from an ever widening area- Judea and Jerusalem, Galilee, Idumea, the areas across the Jordan and regions up to Tyre and Sidon. Look at how extensive that area was. How do you think this new phase felt to the disciples? The one they were following was becoming more and more popular despite the Pharisee's opposition. I think they would be proud to be in his company

And that pride and status grew exponentially when he then *called the followers he wanted to be with him* (v. 13) and he appointed 12 of those as Apostles. That word means messenger or authorized representative. Here's what the New Living Translation Life Application Bible says,


“Jesus did not choose these Twelve to be his associates or companions because for their faith; their faith often faltered he didn't choose them because of their talent and ability; no one stood out with unusual ability. The disciples represented a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences. But apparently they had no more leadership potential than those who were not chosen. The one characteristic they all shared was their willingness to obey Jesus...we should not disqualify ourselves from service to Christ because we do not have the expected credentials. Being a good disciple is simply a matter of following Jesus with a willing heart.

But, why did he choose twelve disciples? The number twelve corresponds with the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19:28. Showing the continuity between the old religious system and the new one based on Jesus' message. Many people followed Jesus but these twelve received the most intense training, We see the impact of these twelve men throughout the rest of the New Testament.” (NLT Life Application Bible. Mark 3:14-15)




So here's a little quiz:

The Twelve Apostles –




Bartholomew

1. He wrote the fourth Gospel and the Book of Revelation.
2. He betrayed Jesus.
3. He was a former tax collector.
4. He doubted Jesus' resurrection.




Phillip

5. He denied Jesus three times.
6. He brought his brother (Peter) to see Jesus and become his follower.
7. He is also known as Nathaniel; he was quick to believe in Jesus.




Matthew

8. His name is often followed by the words “the less” because he was no as well-known as another disciple with the same name.
9. He was the brother of John and the first apostle to be put to death.
10. He brought Bartholomew to Jesus.




Thaddeus


11. His other name was Judas; but he didn't want people to confuse him with Judas Iscariot.
12. His name is sometimes followed with the words “the Zealot.” He wanted the Jews to turn against the Romans.




Judas




Andrew




James




John




Simon Peter



Thomas



James, Son of Alphaeus



Simon

Can you match the number with the correct Apostle's name?

The NLT's description of the Twelve lists these major characteristics of each one:

Simon Peter – impulsive

James – ambitious, short tempered, judgmental

John – ambitious, judgmental – those two brothers later were called ‘the sons of thunder’

Andrew – eager to bring others to Jesus

Philip – questioning attitude

Those five were all fishermen

Bartholomew (also called Nathaniel) – honest and straightforward (as an aside this is the name Bing and Emily have chosen for their newborn son. Nathaniel. May he live into that name!!)

Matthew called Levi– despised outcast because of his dishonest career as a tax collector

Thomas – courage and doubt

James son of alpheus– unknown

Thaddeus – unknown

Simon the Zealot – intense patriotism

Judas Iscariot – treacherous and greedy

Does that sound like a group of people in a church today? Unfortunately, yes. But the power of the gospel is seen in their transformation. That will come later.

III. He called them to represent Him in a ministry like His.

I don't want us to miss the fact that when Jesus designated the Twelve as Apostles, He *chose them to be with him (verse 14) and then sent them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.* The disciples had seen Jesus' authority in his teaching, and his authority over the whole spirit world. Now, as faithful, obedient new followers, Jesus gave them his power to do the same things.

That's awesome beloved, and that's still what Jesus does today. In all three areas. Let me make this practical.

What a confidence it gives us to know that Jesus has our back. Scripture after Scripture talks about his protection of His people. He wants to give us all things in Him. He wants to be our shield and protector. *Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ—neither trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger of sword...No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Neither death nor life nor principalities nor powers shall separate us from His love. We will be able to do all things through Him who gives us strength.* (Rom. 8:35-39, Phil.4:13.) This is the promise to all who follow Jesus as Lord.

Second, like the early apostles, Jesus calls us to Himself in a relationship of love. He wants us to be with him, spending time each day in his presence, knowing his mercy and love as we live throughout the day. Being with Him also means, as it did for the disciples, that we accept the sufferings of being His follower as well as the joy of following in His steps. The Apostle Paul really understood that. You remember how he told the Philippian that his main goal in life was *to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of His suffering, becoming like Him in His death.* (Phil.3:10). His suffering includes denying our egocentric tendencies, and being willing to be persecuted for our faith.

And third, Jesus calls us to Himself so He can send us out on mission. He has a global agenda for the world and has a place for each of us in that mission. We go to heal, to teach, to preach, to deliver people from evil spirits, just as Jesus did. But there may be a cost, as there was for the early Apostles.

I was struck by this story from a Hong Kong Christian named Derek Lam. “Recently (August 2017) he wrote for [The New York Times](#) about the suppression of human rights for Christians in China. Lam wrote:

Since I was 16 years old, I have wanted to be a pastor. I was raised in a Christian family in Hong Kong that urged me to live by biblical principles ... [Those biblical principles] have also informed my democratic activism for the past six years—and it is for that reason that I am likely to be [jailed](#) next month and that I will be barred from ever becoming a pastor.

Lam provides examples of what he calls "an unprecedented erosion of religious freedom in Hong Kong, especially for Christians"—believers forced to worship in underground churches, the government tearing down church buildings. The only way to avoid trouble, Lam says, is for churches to stay quiet and small or to bow down to the current leader of China—Xi Jinping.

But Lam boldly declares, "I won't make Jesus bow down to Xi Jinping. He concludes:

Although there is nothing I would love more than to become a pastor and preach the gospel in Hong Kong, I will never do so if it means making Jesus subservient to Xi Jinping. Instead, I will continue to fight for religious freedom in Hong Kong, even if I have to do it from behind bars. What I ask of you is to keep Hong Kong in your prayers as we seek to find light amid the sea of darkness descending upon

us. Derek Lam, "I Won't Make Jesus Bow Down to Xi Jinping," The New York Times (8-23-17)

The early apostles didn't understand all that becoming a Jesus follower would entail at first, but after Jesus died and rose, when they were filled with the Spirit, they each took their stand to proclaim Christ to their known world and die willingly for Him. By the Spirit they were transformed into bold, courageous and dynamic witnesses for Christ, living out the mission he had originally called them to.

Since Pentecost we also can be filled with the Spirit and empowered to fulfill the mission he has for each of us. That thrills me, beloved. That gives every believer a vital role to play in God's kingdom agenda and a reason to get up in the morning to do the good works God has prepared for each of us with purpose and value and power.

Jesus's care for His disciples and empowerment of them is what caused the Apostles to "stay in" as a follower of Jesus. And though we will see the cost of such obedience was increasingly difficult, that care and power sustained them throughout their earthly life.

It will sustain us as well. That's wonderful good news. Jesus has your back. He calls You to be with Him. And He empowers you through the Spirit to witness and do all the good works that will help others know Him too. So let me close with three practical application questions:

1. How are you free to do what Jesus has called you to because Jesus has your back?
2. How will your time priorities change because He calls those who believe in Him to be with Him?
3. What is the role He wants you to play in the world through the power of the Spirit?

Let's pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 11/4/18

Song of Response: O Jesus I have promised.

O Jesus I have promised to serve you to the end; remain forever near me, my Master and my Friend.
I shall not fear the battle if you are by my side, nor wander from the pathway if you will be my guide.

O let me hear you speaking, in accents clear and still, above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self will
O speak to reassure me, to hasten or control; now speak and make me listen, O guardian of my soul

O Jesus, you have promised to all who follow you that where you are in glory your servant shall be too.
And Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end; O give me grace to follow, my Master and my Friend.

(words: John Bode, Music Arthur Mann)

Discussion question: How are you free to do what Jesus has called you to because Jesus has your back?