

“The King’s Men”

Part I

When you were a child, did someone make you memorize the books of the Bible, or the twelve tribes of Israel? If so, you likely learned the names of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ as well. But, not many people today could not name the apostles, and even fewer could tell you what an apostle *is*. Yet, the apostles of Christ are the foundation upon which the church is built. It is incredibly important that we understand *who* the apostles are.

Luke 6:12-16 “And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; Simon (whom he also named Peter), and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.”

Well, these were the twelve original apostles of the Lord Jesus. There is a difference between a *disciple* and an *apostle*. The text we just read says that Jesus called His *disciples* together, then chose twelve from among them who would be His *apostles*. A disciple is *one who is called to follow Jesus*; an apostle is *one who has been sent out by Jesus on a special mission*.

Judas, we know, was only an apostle for a brief time; he fell from that office when he betrayed Christ, and was later replaced by another disciple named Matthias (**Acts 1**). But, why did Jesus choose and elevate these men in His coming kingdom? We’ll discover in this study that the office to which they were appointed is unique, and was foundational to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus. The apostles were chosen and appointed by the King Himself, and today, we are going to learn more about the King’s men.

The word *apostle* refers to those sent out with authority from the King. The word generically means *one sent*, so by itself, it can refer to many kinds of people and apostleships. But it is used in the scripture in a very special sense, to describe the work and the office of the men whom Jesus chose, to be the foundation of the church. By the way, who was the first apostle? It may surprise you. It wasn’t John the Baptist; he was a prophet, and there is a difference. Nor was it Andrew, though he was one of the first two disciples called by Jesus at the start of His ministry. It may surprise you to know that Jesus was the first apostle. He was an apostle of God the Father.

Hebrews 3:1 “...consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;”

The Hebrew writer is the only one to identify Jesus as an apostle, but he does so for good reason. You see, in the Greek world, an apostle was one sent out by a king or a government, on a mission or with a message; an ambassador of the king, and therefore, vested with the authority to speak on his behalf. Well, Jesus certainly fits all of those requirements. He was sent to earth by God, His Father.

John 7:29 “But I know him: for I am from him, and he hath sent me.”

He was sent to seek and to save the lost.

Luke 19:10 “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.”

And He came with the Father's message, and thus was given the authority to speak on behalf of His Father. So, rightfully, the Bible calls Him an apostle, sent by God to this earth.

Matthew 28:18 "...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."

John the Baptist bore witness of Jesus when he said this:

John 3:34 "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God..."

Jesus told the Pharisees whose message He spoke:

John 7:16 "Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me."

That's the reason the Bible calls Jesus an apostle. Well, God made Jesus a king, and gave to Him a kingdom. Today, Jesus rules from on high, sitting at the right hand of God, and His kingdom consists of those who have been subjugated by Christ, brought under His rule, in submission to the gospel. In other words, those who have obeyed the gospel, and thus, make up His church. Those are His subjects. Jesus came promising that He would assume such a throne and receive a kingdom, and once He performed His work as prophet and priest, He ascended back to heaven and began His reign as King.

Psalms 24:7 "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."

The psalmist here prophetically pictures Jesus, triumphantly sweeping thru the portals of heaven with these beautiful words!

I Timothy 6:15 "Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords;"

Jesus is now reigning as King, at the right hand of God, and will do so until He comes again.

I Corinthians 15:24-25 "Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet."

Since Jesus is now reigning from heaven, He left men to function below, as His representatives. He selected twelve of them before His return to glory and His heavenly coronation, and He sent them forth as His apostles. These men would reign with Him. One time, Jesus pictured them, symbolically, on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (**Matthew 19:28**). What did Jesus mean by that? It simply means that these men would be given authority in Christ's Kingdom, and their word would judge the people. Judas, we remember, fell away from the rest, losing his apostleship when he sinned and betrayed Jesus. Matthias was chosen to take his place, as we mentioned earlier.

These men, therefore, were in place on the Day of Pentecost when the church was established and the kingdom began its rule in the hearts of men. They became, at that point, the foundation of the church. You might be thinking, *I thought Jesus was the foundation of the church*. The Bible doesn't call Jesus the foundation of the church at all.

Ephesians 2:20 "And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone;"

So, these men, functioning as the emissaries of Christ, make up the foundation of the church, Paul says. That's still the case. They're still functioning as the foundation of the church. *How can that be, since the last apostle died nearly 2,000 years ago?* They remain the foundation of the church throughout the ages by way of what the Holy Spirit inspired them to write to the church.

You see, the church doesn't dig up and replace the foundation with each passing generation. The foundation that Jesus laid is still there, and the church is built upon it. That's why the Bible is so very important. It contains the words of those men chosen by Jesus, called His apostles that were written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit that was given to them.

Now, there was a thirteenth apostle added, and we'll talk more about that in our next study. That was the apostle Paul. He once called himself *one born out of due season*, meaning that he came after the others as an apostle, but yet he was identified as one, like the ones before him. Paul's mission was unique, in that he was an apostle chosen by Christ to go to the Gentiles.

How did these men become apostles? What made them apostles? What kind of qualifications did they have to meet to become apostles? First, in light of the definition of the word, they had to be sent by Christ. Now, not everyone who is sent out is an apostle. I may send my child out to the store for a loaf of bread, but that doesn't make them an apostle. It's more than merely being sent. The apostles of Christ were sent out *by Christ*, on an official *mission* by the King, with an official *message* of the King, given the authority to speak *on behalf* of the King.

Dr. Luke in his gospel says that Jesus was with these men after His resurrection, and tells us what He talked with them about.

Luke 24:45-49 "Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. And ye are witnesses of these things. And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high."

What did Jesus mean when He said, "*ye are witnesses of these things*"? He didn't mean that they were going to see all of these things come to pass. He meant that they were witnesses to the fact that He had suffered and risen again; eyewitnesses to the fact that He was now alive, and therefore, *I am who I said that I am*—the Son of God, the Messiah sent from heaven to earth. Notice that Jesus, in telling them this, is sending them on a mission, to serve as witnesses to His resurrection. Then He tells them that He would send the Holy Spirit, empowering the apostles to go forth on their mission. But, first, they had to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit to come to them.

Well, they went to Jerusalem and Jesus ascended back to heaven, and while they were waiting there for the promise of the Father, as Jesus had told them to do, that's when they chose Matthias to replace Judas. This new apostle had to be selected on the basis of an important qualification:

Acts 1:21-22 "Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us. Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection."

So, in order for one to be an apostle of Christ, he had to be with the Lord, and he had to be an eyewitness of the resurrection. That is, to have seen the Lord after He came forth from the grave. Well, all of these men that Jesus chose had seen Jesus in His resurrected body, and could go forth with a credible testimony to others that Jesus was alive, and was therefore, Lord and Christ. Therefore, His word is true and He is the way of salvation.

Paul could later be made an apostle, even though he wasn't with Jesus after His resurrection and before His ascension. That's because Jesus appeared to Paul (who was then Saul) on the road to Damascus (**Acts 9**). That's why all of that transpired. You see, when we read through the conversion stories in the book of Acts, we don't read where Jesus appeared to other people like He did Saul; that was a special case. Here's the reason:

Acts 9:15 “...for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”

In other words, Paul was being *sent out* as an apostle to the Gentiles. So, all of the apostles met these qualifications, and were sent by King Jesus as His representatives, on the divine mission of testifying that He is indeed the Christ.

Someone says, *aren't we ALL sent out by Jesus to tell other people about Him? Isn't that really the duty of every Christian?* Well, in a sense. But, not in the same sense as they were. Being told to go preach the gospel originally revealed by the apostles is NOT the same thing as being an apostle of Christ, sent out to be His ambassador, and being granted His authority to speak for Him. There are some terms and titles that belong to the apostles of Jesus Christ, and there was a uniqueness to their mission and their work, that is often and erroneously applied to preachers and other Christians today. Many of these terms that describe the apostolic office don't apply to you or me. One of those terms is *ambassador*.

II Corinthians 5:20 “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

This verse is often quoted to say that all Christians supposedly represent Jesus, but that's not what Paul is teaching at all. An *ambassador* is *one who is sent in an official capacity, and thus possesses the authority to represent the King or the government that sends him*. Here in the United States, we send ambassadors all over the world and other countries do, too. This country's ambassadors have the authority to speak for the United States in those other foreign countries; they become our spokespersons, as it were.

Paul isn't talking about Christians, or even preachers in general. Look at his use of personal pronouns in the above passage:

II Corinthians 5:20 “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.”

Don't gloss over that. Notice that *you* and *we*, as Paul uses them in this verse, have two different antecedents. *YOU*—the people to whom Paul was writing, refers to the church at Corinth. *WE/US*—refers to those who gave the word of reconciliation to them, and introduced them to the will of Jesus Christ; those who brought them to Christ. You see, I don't have a message from the King today. I fit in

with the church at Corinth, not the apostles. You fit in with the church at Corinth, if you're a Christian, not the apostles. They had a special office.

People often tell preachers today, *I enjoyed your message. I appreciate your message.* The fact is, I don't have a message. It's a misnomer when you tell me, or any other preacher that you like or appreciate my message. I'm not a messenger and I don't have a message. What I AM doing, and what any other preacher who preaches the truth is doing, is preaching the message that has already been sent and received. You see, THEY were the messengers, and WE have simply been entrusted with the message that Christ sent to earth through THEM. That message comes down to us in the form of God's word.

What that means is that I, nor any other preacher, do not have the authority to preach one single thing that's not already been preached. I don't have the authority to represent one single thing to you as the word of God besides what has already been written down in the word of God. I don't have the authority of an apostle, and neither does any other preacher today. THEY, the apostles, had the authority that Christ vested in THEM. I am only to speak as God has already spoken in His word.

I Peter 4:11 "If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God;"

That doesn't make me an ambassador or a messenger of Christ; it makes THEM--the apostles, those men whom Christ selected to be the foundation of His church—it makes THEM His ambassadors, and it gives the authority to them, which is where it belongs. It puts it in the book, and not in men today. That's where the authority belongs. Friend, beware of these preachers who tell you that they have a message from the Lord; those who claim some kind of supernatural authority beyond the truth of the gospel which has already been written down.

Today, you'll also hear people talk about being *witnesses*, or *testifying* for Jesus. The only time the Bible uses those terms is in regard to the apostles of Christ, and that's for good reason. THEY were eyewitnesses of the resurrected Christ. I can't claim that, and neither can you. I don't believe in Jesus because I've seen Him. I don't believe in Jesus because I've audibly heard Him speak, or had some personal, visible, supernatural encounter with Him. I believe in Jesus upon the testimony of those who were the eyewitnesses of Jesus' death and resurrection. Their testimony—not mine—is what converts the world. The power of salvation is in the gospel that THEY first preached; not in something that I claim to have experienced. I'm not a witness of Jesus. I merely believe the testimony of those who were witnesses of Him. I carry their testimony to others by preaching the gospel, which is their testimony written down. In so doing, I encourage you and others to believe their testimony as I go about from place to place, telling others about it.

Remember the occasion when Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection, and Thomas was not present? We don't know where Thomas was or what he was doing, but he wasn't there, and the other disciples went and told him that they'd seen the Lord. But, Thomas was skeptical.

John 20:25 "...But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe."

Well, Jesus gave Thomas that opportunity. He again met with the disciples, and this time, Thomas was present.

John 20:27-28 “Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.”

That is to say, *I now believe*. What did Jesus say to him after that?

John 20: 29 “Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”

He doesn't mean that faith is some abstract thing that we believe without evidence. What He is saying is, *Blessed are all of those who will come after you, who, unlike you, believe based upon the testimony of others*. In other words, they won't believe because they have seen me with their eyes and touched me with their hands; they will believe based upon the testimony that you men go out into the world and preach.

It is incredibly important that we understand that, because it places and keeps the authority where it belongs: within the inspired New Testament scriptures, and not in fallible men today.

Lord willing, in our next study together, we will look at all of the implications of that. What kind of authority do the apostles possess? Are Paul's writings binding upon the church today? That's a matter of great controversy, isn't it? What about what Paul said about a number of controversial subjects? What about when he said, “*To the rest, say I; not the Lord*”? Does that mean that an apostle didn't really have authority in all matters? What about people who say, *I just go by the words in red in my Bible*. Are there apostles alive in the church today? Is that an office men today can hold? Please plan to join us for the second part of our study.