

“The King’s Men”

Part III

There is no more important office in the church than that of the apostle. We’ve been referring to the apostles as *The King’s Men* in our series of studies over the past few broadcasts, because they were sent out on an official mission by the King of kings. We’ve learned *who* the original apostles were, *when* and *how* they were called by Christ, and *why* they were called by Him. The last time, we learned about the addition of Paul to their number: why he was qualified to be an apostle, even though he wasn’t actually with Jesus during His ministry, or immediately following His resurrection, which was a qualification of being an apostle. We also learned about the authority that these men possessed in the kingdom as Christ’s ambassadors. They were sent to represent King Jesus, vested with the authority to do so, and to deliver messages from the King in heaven to those of us on earth below. And, Christ Jesus clothed them with authority. The Holy Spirit then furnished them with the power to fulfill this mission, and to demonstrate their apostolic credentials.

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

Jesus spoke of the authority that was inherent in the office that these men held when He spoke to them:

Matthew 16:18-19 “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Well, a number of questions arise from this text: was Jesus exalting Peter to a position of higher authority than the other apostles? Did their apostolic authority mean that they could arbitrarily devise any rules or laws for the kingdom, and Jesus would just submit to their will and also bind it upon the church? Is the position and power that Jesus speaks of here successive; that is, were Peter and the other apostles replaced upon their deaths, and do men today fill their place and have the same authority that Peter and the others had? We’ll look to the word of God for the answers to those questions in this installment of our study.

The Lord Jesus taught that when His kingdom was established, the apostles He chose would rule over it on earth, under the supreme rule of Christ in heaven. It would be up to the apostles to reveal the gospel plan of salvation to mankind, and to confirm that message with signs and wonders. These men would set up the framework, the pattern of New Testament Christianity for the ages, and they would be the final authority in all matters of faith, doctrine and practice.

Most people who are acquainted with the New Testament scriptures acknowledge the authority inherent in being called *an apostle of Christ*. However, the question arises: who then are the present apostles in the church? Who has the final word on matters of doctrine and practice? Some believe that if we could have some sort of a council of men within the universal concept of the church we could look to, who possess authority in matters of religion, that that would be the solution to all of the division and sectarianism that we see about us today. Some believe that there are living apostles who function in that capacity in the church today, and therefore, they serve as a universal authority over the kingdom of

God. The doctrine is called *apostolic succession*, and it is a keystone of Catholicism and Anglicanism, including the Episcopalians, Mormons and others who believe in some form of apostolic succession. That is, that there are people who occupy authority in the so-called church today, that can be traced back through the ages to the original apostles in a successive line, from the first century down to today. They appeal to passages such as **Matthew 16:18-19**, which we read earlier. They say that this passage shows us that there are men in the church today who have the power to bind and loose in spiritual matters. Or, they will point to passages like this one:

Acts 20:28 “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God...”

Here, Paul is speaking to the elders over the congregation in Ephesus—not elders over the universal church; the universal church has no organization, and no hierarchy of authority. These were merely elders over a congregation, and their authority extended no farther than the congregation over which they were elders.

Still others turn to this passage:

II Timothy 2:2 “And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.”

They will say that this passage and others somehow prove this idea of apostolic succession, passing on the mantle. But IS that what these passages are even teaching? There are a number of glaring problems with the idea of a continuing, successive office of the apostles. Let’s notice a few of them.

First of all, the notion of apostolic succession didn’t appear until nearly the end of the second century, more than 140 years after the establishment of the church. The religious organizations that claim it depend on lists that were compiled, starting at the end of the second century. That seems like a long, long time ago, and it is. A.D. 170 may have been nearly two thousand years ago, but the problem is that it’s about a hundred years too late, because the apostles of Christ never indicated that they would be succeeded by others in their apostolic office. That idea originated sometime later.

In fact, what the apostles DID say indicates the very opposite idea of apostolic succession. Remember what we learned in our last study about this passage:

Acts 1:22 “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.”

The apostles of Christ had to be *eyewitnesses* of the Lord Jesus after His resurrection. Paul was made an apostle because the Lord appeared to him on the road to Damascus. Paul would later ask:

I Corinthians 9:1 “Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord?”

So, Paul points to that as proof that he IS an apostle, and he DID see Jesus on the road to Damascus. In **Acts 22**, Paul was quoting Ananias, who was sent to baptize him into Christ:

Acts 22:14-15 “And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.”

So, that's what it took to be called an apostle. Then, look at what Paul says here:

I Corinthians 15:3-9 "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

Paul not only affirms here that even though he came later than the others, he was still qualified to be an apostle because the Lord appeared to him on the Damascus road, but notice that he says that he was *the last* to see Him. Now, if an apostle had to have seen Christ after His resurrection in order to be a witness of Jesus Christ, how could anyone today be an apostle of the Lord, when Paul said that he was *the last one* to see Jesus?

Secondly, Peter didn't indicate that he would have any kind of successor. Rather, he wrote this:

II Peter 1:13-16 "Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavor that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty."

There it is again. What made Peter an apostle of Christ, besides the fact that Jesus chose him and the others, is that he was an *eyewitness of His majesty*, and could therefore be sent out with the divine testimony of the fact that He IS indeed the Christ, risen from the dead. He wanted them to remember what he told them while he was with them. Now, if Peter was to have a successor, why would he be so careful and urgent to remind these people what he had taught them before he died? Wouldn't a new apostle simply take up the reins that Peter had laid down? No, Peter told them it was essential that they remember what he taught them.

Another point we need to consider is that one doesn't re-delegate delegated authority. The authority that the apostles received was received directly from the Lord—not from man or a group of men. Rather, Jesus chose the men who would represent Him as His ambassadors when His kingdom was established. Think about it: can an ambassador appoint somebody to be his successor? Have you ever heard of that happening? Is that how it works with kingdoms and governments today? If our president appointed and sent an ambassador over to China, and let's say that that ambassador is about to die or retire; do you suppose it would be within his rights and his authority to just decide to appoint another ambassador to take his place? Or do you suppose it would be appropriate for the other ambassadors of the United States scattered around the world to come together in some conclave in order to decide who would be the successor of this ambassador to China? Is that how it works? No, it's not. The president chooses the ambassador who goes to that country.

Well, Jesus chose His representatives. They didn't come together in some conclave to deliberate and decide who would be the apostles of the Lord Jesus; the Lord made that determination. And, later, when Judas fell away because of his sin, we recall that Matthias was chosen to replace him. Someone says, *see there, the apostles chose who took the place of Judas*. But, you see, they didn't. The Lord chose the replacement. **Acts 1:24-25** bears that out. I know there are people who challenge the validity of the appointment of Matthias by saying that the apostles were presumptuously appointing him to be the apostle, but that is not what Luke tells us.

Acts 1:24-25 “And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen. That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell...”

The Lord did the choosing. So, in each case, the King selected those who would be His ambassadors. Christ appointed those who would serve as apostles. Those who believe in apostolic succession today have all manner of ceremony and ritual by which they come together and choose or appoint who is to be the next in line in this so-called chain of authority. But Jesus is the One who chose His apostles.

Interestingly, we never read of any other apostle being replaced. In **Acts 12** when we read of the apostle James being beheaded, we don't read one word in the scriptures about any of the apostles or anyone else in the church gathering together to appoint a successor for him.

Catholicism contends that Peter, as an apostle, was elevated above the other apostles, and that he was the first so-called pope, the vicar of Christ. Consequently, though the other apostles had authority, they were beneath, and subject to, Peter. They believe that even today, the Pope holds that position of supreme authority beneath Christ within the Catholic church. But, hear what Jesus said to His apostles:

Luke 22:29-30 “And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Notice what He said: ALL of the apostles would sit on thrones of judgment. This was a figure of the authority that their words would possess. There wasn't one throne for Peter, then eleven below him. Jesus didn't indicate anything like that. Although Peter was preeminent in the fact that he preached the first gospel sermon on the Day of Pentecost, and the first to bear the gospel to the Gentiles, the reality is that he had no authority over the other apostles. They had the same authority over the church. The Bible simply does not teach that Peter had superior authority over the others.

Think about what the idea of Peter being superior over the others, as well as the idea that the apostles have been succeeded generation by generation means. The Catholic church says that three men succeeded Peter in the first century alone: Linus (A.D.67-79), Cletus (A.D.79-91) and Clement (A.D.91-100). Yet, nearly everyone agrees that the apostle John was still alive during that time. Now, are we really to believe that these three men in succession, who didn't see the Lord, who weren't with the Lord, so far as is revealed...are we to believe that they were superior also, and in authority over John, who DID know the Lord and who DID see Him after His resurrection, who WAS an eyewitness of His majesty, who penned the great revelation near the close of the first century—after these men supposedly were elevated to this higher position of authority that Peter once held? Friend, who can believe that?

So then, if the apostles ARE the foundation of the church, as Paul affirmed that they are (**Ephesians 2:20**), and if those apostles appointed by Christ died long ago, then the question arises: how can the church continue to function? If those men had authority delegated to them by Christ in all matters of doctrine and practice, how then are we to know if we are abiding in the truth? That's a good question, but you see, that's why this whole false notion of apostolic succession came about anyway. It was devised to guard against false teaching and heresy. That was the whole point behind it. The ironic thing is that when the concept was first spoken of, an apostasy had already begun. The very ones claiming apostolic succession were part of that apostasy. They were the ones who were making distinctions already between bishops and elders, and creating other church offices that the apostles of Christ never said anything about. Remember what Paul told the Galatians.

Galatians 1:8 "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed."

Groups who believe in apostolic succession say that their lineage of apostles proves that they are the true church. They say that they know they are the church of the Bible, the church of the Lord, because they can trace the succession of authority from present day all the way back to the very beginning. But that's not right. That's not the acid test. The Bible says that the word of God is the *seed of the kingdom* (**Luke 8**). And it is the word of God that proves which one is the right church, and provides the test as to what is truth and what is error, what is of God and what is of men.

The apostles that Jesus appointed are STILL the apostles today. They're STILL in authority. How? By their writings that now make up the New Testament. They STILL sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, as Jesus symbolically said. They STILL are the foundation upon which the church is built. They provided the structure and the pattern for worship and work, and they revealed and published the gospel that has yet been entrusted to US through the scriptures, to carry to the world and point men to the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

That's why the scriptures are so very vital. I know there are so many people who dismiss the Bible as being merely an antique relic or a collection of some old religious writings that have no real relevance to the church today. The scriptures are so vital because they are the product of the apostolic office. That's why it matters what the Bible says. It matters what it says about how we're saved, how we're to worship, and how we are to live and conduct ourselves. The New Testament was written by the apostles and prophets of the first century who were appointed by Christ Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit, and the things that they wrote are the declarations of none less than the appointed ambassadors of the Lord. Inspired by the Holy Spirit and providentially preserved for the church in ages to come, so that we might have it as our only creed.

Think about it. What would a successor to any apostle do that has not already been done? Look what Jesus said to the men that He chose as His apostles:

John 16:13 "...the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth..."

The Spirit would guide them into all truth. Peter himself later said this:

II Peter 1:3 "...hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness..."

We're not still waiting on a new revelation from heaven. Today, we don't need fresh guidance from above. We have the guidance that we need, if we'll merely open our minds and hearts to what the Book says, and let it guide us in all matters of faith and practice. Friends, that's why we must respect and follow the authority of the apostles, and thus the scriptures, if we are to be the New Testament church that Jesus built.