

The Master's Men

Luke 6:12-16

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Luke begins in verse 12, “Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also 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 the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.”

All through redemptive history in the Scriptures, God has chosen to use ordinary people to do extraordinary things. That is the overarching theme of our text. God chooses ordinary people. We tend to put the apostles on a pedestal, but the Bible is clear that they were men just like we are, and they all had feet of clay. But God uses the clay pot, the Bible says, to fill with His glory and use for His purposes. If the Bible says we're all clay pots, we're crack pots actually. But He fills us and uses us for His glory.

The Bible says, “For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence” (1 Corinthians 1:26-29).

In Acts 4:13, these apostles were called “uneducated and untrained men” by their enemies, the religious community. “And they realized that they had been with Jesus.” No one spends three years with Jesus Christ and is unlearned and ignorant! But the world viewed them as being ignorant and unlearned.

What is the context of our passage? Luke 6:11 says, “But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.” Jesus had just healed the man with the withered hand in the synagogue, so they began to conspire how they could kill Jesus. Jesus healed the man and put his body back in shape, yet they all flew into a rage and wanted to kill Him! So in the context, Jesus realized that His days were numbered. And He realized that out of His massive group of disciples—hundreds of them—He had to pick 12 men to become the foundation of His future work, to become the foundation of the church and they would be those He would entrust with the Scriptures. So Jesus picks the Master's men, in verses 12-16.

the setting, verse 12; the selecting, verses 13-16; the sending, at the end of verse 13; their significance; and their shortcomings.

First, we see the setting for His selecting, in verse 12. “Now it came to pass in those days that

He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.” Notice that the time was referred to as “Now it came to pass in those days.” That’s not very specific, other than in the context it takes us back to Luke 6:1-11, when they were in the grain field and were accused of violating the Sabbath by the religious leaders, who flew into a rage; and they were in the synagogue where Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, so they freaked out because Jesus did something good on the Sabbath. So “in those days” would cover the events in verses 1-11.

Now notice the place where Jesus went. “He went out to the mountain to pray.” What mountain was it? We don’t know. When you tour Israel, a mountain will be picked out and it was said, “That happened on this mountain.” How do they know? They don’t. It’s just a great place to have a tourist stop to buy souvenirs. All around the Sea of Galilee there are lots of mountains. So Jesus went up on a mountain.

But we do know why Jesus went up on the mountain. It was “to pray.” Now Luke’s focus in his Gospel is on the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was fully or truly man and fully or truly God. The theological term for that is the “hypostatic union,” which means two natures in one. He was sinless humanity but true humanity and full deity. “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9).

Because of Jesus’ humanity, He prayed. People ask me, “Why would Jesus pray if He is God?” Good question. The answer is because He was also a man. Prayer speaks of human need. And Jesus had needs as a human being. He needed God the Father’s wisdom, God the Father’s strength, God the Father’s guidance, so just like you and me, He prayed to His Father for those things. There were times when Jesus prayed, like in Gethsemane when He was in agony, and God the Father sent angels to God the Son in His Incarnation to give Him strength and health. In the book of Luke, we’ll see that the angels came to Jesus to help and strengthen Him, because He wasn’t just God; He was also man.

So Luke’s Gospel emphasizes the prayer life of Jesus, because it emphasizes His humanity. “The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). That’s the theme of the Gospel of Luke.

Now notice that Jesus prayed “all night,” verse 12. That’s amazing. And He prayed “to God,” who was the Father. So here we have the doctrine of the Trinity; God the Son praying to God the Father through the power of God the Holy Spirit.

When we pray, our prayers are Trinitarian; we pray to God the Father, through God the Son in the power and energy of God the Holy Spirit. You might say that we pray to the Father, through the merits of the Son as we approach Him, and we do it in the power and the energy of the Holy Spirit. And all our prayers submit to the will, purpose and plan of God. “Not my will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

What did Jesus pray for? The Bible doesn’t say. But in context, I believe He prayed for God’s

will in picking the 12 apostles. It was no accident that the night before the morning that He would pick the 12 apostles, He spent the night in prayer. So the inference is that He spent the night in prayer for wisdom and guidance in picking the 12 apostles.

In the church today, whenever we pick spiritual leaders, we should spend time in prayer for His guidance. We should pick them based on the qualifications laid out in the Word of God. In John 17:6, Jesus said to His Father, in His great high-priestly prayer, "You gave them to Me," speaking of His apostles. So He prayed for wisdom and for guidance.

Sometimes people will ask me, "Well, why should we pray?" Let me give you five reasons. Number one, Jesus prayed. A good reason to pray is because Jesus prayed.

Number two, the disciples prayed. So we, too, should pray. And Jesus gave us the form of prayer: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name" (Matthew 6:9). It's not to be prayed verbatim necessarily; it's okay to do that, if your heart's engaged. But it's a model or pattern for prayer.

Number three, the apostles prayed. All the apostles listed in our text were men who prayed.

Number four, the early church prayed. All through the book of Acts, the Christians got together to pray. So should we.

Number five, we are commanded in the Bible to pray, Luke 18:1. "Men always ought to pray and not lose heart." We should always pray and not faint. The problem is that we don't pray, thus we faint. If we prayed, we wouldn't be faint. We gain help and strength by seeking God in prayer. And if Christ needed help, strength, guidance and wisdom, so do we. And we find it on our knees, praying to "Our Father in heaven."

In John 15:5, Jesus said, "Without Me you can do nothing." Notice it doesn't say, "Without Me you can't do much." That's the way I interpret that verse: "Without Me you can only do a little bit." No; it says, "Without Me you can do nothing." So we need Jesus in every area of our lives.

We all need the Lord. The more we understand our weaknesses, our inabilities, our inadequacies, they will drive us to our knees in prayer, and the stronger we will be. So use your weakness to drive you to Christ in prayer.

The second section of our text is the selecting, verses 13-16. "And when it was day..." after the night of prayer "...He called His disciples to Himself." I believe God calls us to salvation. And I believe God calls us to service, especially those He calls to pastoral ministry as elders or overseers of the church. That is to be a call from God. The pastoral ministry is a calling from God. Any man would be a fool to promote himself into that position, if he weren't genuinely, authentically called by God.

Some of the great casualties in ministry were because they weren't called; they were self-appointed. The only thing that can sustain a pastor through years of ministry is the call of God

behind him, not the need in front of him.

What keeps me going is that I am absolutely convinced that He has called me. And I want to be faithful to the call of God until I hear His words, "Well done, good and faithful servant....Enter into the joy of your Lord" (Matthew 25:23). That's what motivates me.

So Jesus called them "...and from them He chose twelve whom He also names apostles," verse 13. There is a difference between a disciple and an apostle. A disciple is a "learner." You would be learning at the feet of Jesus. An apostle is one who was "sent." And it always carries the idea of authority. There is no authority in discipleship; you're receiving teaching. There is authority in apostleship; you're being commissioned or sent on an errand. You represent Christ. So Jesus called these 12 men and anoints or appoints them as apostles.

Why did He call 12? We don't know. There were 12 tribes in Israel that formed the foundation for their faith.

You probably were grieved, like me, when you watch the news to see the anti-Semitism that is on the rise in the United States and around the world right now. Anti-Semitism will reach a peak that it has not reached before in all of history during the tribulation period. The time of the greatest persecution of the Jewish people will be just before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. We're living in the last days. We're living at the end of time.

I was saddened to see an interview with an older woman, who was a Jew in New York City, who said, "I'm moving to Israel; America's gone. Jews are not safe in America anymore. I'm going to flee to Israel. There are strength in numbers." It broke my heart.

But it is all part of God's prophetic plan. God is bringing His people to that land. Then the church will be taken out, the Antichrist will be revealed, they'll think it's their Messiah, then they'll figure out they've been deceived for three-and-a-half years, God's wrath will be poured out on the earth and then Jesus Christ will return. It's all been laid out in God's Word. But we're watching it unfold before our very eyes. And the Bible says in Zechariah 12:3 that "Jerusalem [will become] a very heavy stone for all peoples." It's happening now. But God sits on the throne and God is in control.

If you don't know the Lord and you haven't repented and believed in Jesus, I would get right with God quickly, because at any time, the Lord will come and take the church home to heaven.

Now just a little footnote. All the apostles were men. The reason I say this is because when I was prepping for this sermon, on the weekend on YouTube, there was a woman preacher who called herself "an apostle." There are no more apostles in the church. The 12 apostles were appointed directly by Jesus. They were with Jesus and saw His Resurrection. They were given authority by Jesus. And they laid the foundation of the church. Once the foundation was laid, there were no more apostles. And there are no declared women apostles in the Bible.

In looking at this list of apostles, I found it fascinating. There are four lists in the New Testament

of the apostles. They are in Matthew 10, in Mark 3, in Luke 6 and in Acts 1. What is interesting about these four lists is that the names in all four lists appear in three groups of four each. In each list, Peter is always first, and Judas Iscariot is always listed last. They were all from Galilee except Judas Iscariot. Most of them were fishermen. One, Matthew or Levi, was a tax collector. Another one was a zealot, Simon, who was a rebel against the Roman government. But all were common, ordinary men.

Charles Erdman said that "All of the 12 were men of modest means, had humble stations of life. They were used by God to turn the world upside down." I like that.

The first group, in verse 14, consists of "Simon, whom He also named Peter." What do you say about Peter? He was an amazing apostle. But I don't believe he was the first pope. There is no indication that there was a succession today down to the pope. But Simon is always listed first, because he was a leading apostle of the group. When Jesus asked, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" some answered, "John the Baptist, some Elijah...or one of the prophets." Then Jesus asked, "But who do you say that I am?" Then Simon Peter spoke up and answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then what did Jesus say? "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 16:13-17).

When Peter heard that, he probably looked at the others and said, "Yeah! Did you hear that, man? I am the anointed apostle! Check one for me!"

Then immediately Jesus told them that He was going to Jerusalem to "be handed into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified" (Luke 24:7) and put to death. But then Peter said to Him, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" Then Jesus said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan!" (Matthew 16:22-23). Peter probably thought, I hope they didn't hear that one! So Peter struck out; he had feet of clay.

But Peter was an amazing apostle. He always was the spokesman of the group. He walked on water. When we get to heaven, we'll see that Peter has a tee shirt that says, "I walked on water!" But when Peter got his eyes off of Jesus, he began to sink. Peter is the one who Jesus had to rescue.

The first half of the book of Acts, chapters 1-11, is all about Peter. In Acts 2, on the day of Pentecost, Peter was the first to preach, and 3,000 souls were saved and added to the church that day. He was given "the keys of the kingdom" (Matthew 16:19), and he went, in Acts 10-11, to the home of Cornelius, and the Gentiles were brought into the kingdom of God. And the list could go on.

The second apostle listed is "Andrew his brother." Andrew is the friendly apostle, who found his brother, Peter, and brought him to Jesus. He also brought the little boy who had the five loaves and two fish to Jesus. I think the boy was hiding with his lunch, Andrew found him and said, "Come here, kid. You're gonna share that lunch!" He pulled the boy to the Lord, and Jesus

multiplied the bread and fish. And when the Gentiles, called "Greeks," came to Philip saying, "We want to see Jesus," he took them to Andrew and asked him, "What do we do?" Andrew said, "Let's take them to Jesus" (John 12:20-22).

Then rounding out this first list of four is "James and John," in verse 14. They are brothers. If I asked you to name the apostles, a lot of people would be able to say, "Peter, James and John." They're known as "the inner circle," because Jesus would sometimes separate them from the others, such as when they were on the mount of transfiguration, when they were in the home of Jairus to bring his daughter back from the dead and when they went deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane with Jesus.

It was James and John's mother, Mrs. Zebedee, who came to Jesus to ask a favor of Him. She asked that when her sons came to heaven, could they sit next to Jesus on the throne, "one on Your right hand and the other on the left." James and John probably were embarrassed by that. Jesus asked them, "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able" (Matthew 20:21-22).

James and John were called "the sons of thunder." They were called that because when Jesus was going to pass through Samaria, they didn't want Him to go that way because of the racial prejudice against the Jews. So James and John asked Jesus, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" Jesus told them to calm down. "You do not know what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives but to save them" (Luke 9:54-56). Jesus was probably thinking, Where did I get these guys?! That's like going street-witnessing with a blow torch! "Turn or burn!" That'll really win you points. Good old James and John!

John, by the way, is the writer of the Gospel of John, the epistles of John and the book of Revelation. As far as volume goes, John wrote most of the New Testament. He wrote more of the New Testament than any of the other apostles.

In the second group of apostles are Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew and Thomas, verses 14-15. Philip was known as "the practical apostle." I think it was because he always had a calculator and several pens in his breast pocket. Whenever he was perplexed, he would take his calculator out to try to figure things out.

In John 14, Jesus said that He was going to His Father's house. And it was Philip who said, "'Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.' Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father.'" (John 14:8-9).

And when Jesus was going to feed the 5,000 with the loaves of bread, Philip said, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may have a little" (John 6:7). Philip was calculating it all out. The problem is that he forgot to calculate

Jesus into the equation. When you're looking at your problem, calculating your resources, you say, "Can't happen; we don't have enough money." But you have to add to your equation "+ Jesus = no problem." He owns "the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10). We'll just ask Him to sell a couple and give us the money.

The next apostle in the group is Bartholomew. He is also called Nathaniel, but only in the Gospel of John.

Next we have Matthew, in verse 15, who we also know is called Levi. He was a tax collector and wrote the Gospel of Matthew.

Then there is Thomas. I like Thomas. He is called "doubting Thomas," because he is always looking on the sad, dark, negative side of issues. When Jesus was in Galilee and said to His disciples that they must go down to Judea because Lazarus was sick, then he died so Jesus was going to raise him from the dead, they told Him that if He goes to that area, He would be arrested and put to death. Jesus said it was God's will so He needed to go. Then Thomas said, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (John 11:16). Every group has a Mr. Negative.

Then there was another time when Thomas was in the upper room with Jesus, and Jesus said, "Where I go you know, and the way you know." Jesus was talking about going to heaven, to the Father's house. But Thomas said, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" But as a result of that, Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:4-6). So we need Thomas.

Poor Thomas; this is his history. After Jesus rose from the dead, Thomas wasn't there in the upper room with the others. The doors were locked and the windows closed. But Jesus suddenly appeared in their midst. And they told Thomas later that Jesus had been with them. But Thomas said, "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" (John 20:25).

Thomas blew it! See what happens when you don't go to church? You miss out.

Then they all got together again eight days later, including Thomas, and Jesus again stood in their midst. "Then He 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.'" I believe that Thomas immediately fell to his knees and said, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:27-28). That is an amazing affirmation that Jesus Christ is God. Thomas called Jesus "God." So this was doubting Thomas.

Now there is a third group of apostles, verses 15-16. We know very little or next to nothing about them. There is James the son of Alphaeus; Simon called the Zealot; Judas the son of James; and Judas Iscariot, who we are familiar with.

James the son of Alphaeus is also called "James the less." Why? We don't know. He's not known on earth, but he is known in heaven, and that's all that matters.

Simon the Zealot could mean that he was a part of the zealot group that rebelled against Roman authority and the Roman government. They sometimes even acted violently and killed Romans.

Judas the son of James is also called Thaddaeus in Matthew 10 and Mark 3.

Then we have Judas Iscariot. Many people wonder why Jesus would pick a traitor. I don't know. But I do know that God chose to bring good out of evil. I do know that He speaks of a lost opportunity. You can come to church to listen to the sermons and hear the Gospel but die in your sins and go to hell for all eternity.

Judas Iscariot hung out with Jesus for three years, but he went to perdition. He was "the son of perdition" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). He was chosen by Jesus. Jesus washed his feet in the upper room! Yet he betrayed Christ with a kiss. And where Jesus asked, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?" the word "kiss" there means "to smother with kisses repeatedly and affectionately."

So you can be this close to Jesus and yet so far. It was a lost opportunity. There is always a false believer among the true. But God uses good to come out of evil. Jesus knew Judas Iscariot would betray Him, but God would use it for the death of Messiah to bring to salvation a lost world.

We have seen the setting and the selecting. Now I want to look at the sending. It says, "He chose twelve whom He also named apostles." As I said, the word "apostle" means "sent out." It conveys the idea of being sent out with authority. We use the word "ambassador" today, which is closely related.

Why were these 12 sent out? To preach, to heal, to be witnesses (Acts 1:8), to lay the foundation of the church and to give us the New Testament, so we can continue "steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine," the Word of God (Acts 2:42).

Now we will look at their significance. And there are no more apostles. There are five facts of their significance. Number one, the apostles laid the foundation of the church, Ephesians 2:20. It says that the church, "having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."

Number two, the apostles are significant because they would receive direct revelation from God, which was not known to the Old Testament saints and was delivered to us in the Scriptures, such as the revelation of the church and the rapture.

Number three, the apostles were given miraculous power to confirm their message, 2 Corinthians 12:12.

Number four, the apostles gave us the Bible. "The B-i-b-l-e; yes, that's the book for me." Go back to the anti-Semitism in our world today. Jesus was a Jew. Jesus said, "Salvation is of the

Jews" (John 4:22). The apostles were all Jews.

The names of these 12 apostles are going to be inscribed on the foundation of the new, holy city of Jerusalem. "The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Revelation 21:14). You're hating a people group, who are going to have their very names listed on the foundation of the new Jerusalem for all eternity?! That's pretty crazy. So we see here that the apostles gave us the Word of God.

Number five, let's look at the apostles' shortcomings. Despite their privileges and the important position they held, the apostles were by no means perfect. They were ordinary, sinful men saved by God's grace, yet they were used for the glory of God.

God wants to use us. You don't have to be perfect to be used by God. You have to be available. You just have to be obedient. What God blesses is not great ability but great availability. I don't care how old you are, where you come from in life, if you "present your bodies [to God as] a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1), your life will be lived in the wonder and the splendor and the glory of being used by God as His instrument in life.

Jesus said, "Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matthew 16:25). If you seek to find your life, you're going to lose it. If you lose your life for Christ and His Gospel, you'll find it. I'm not saving you're all going to be called to be full-time pastors or ministers or missionaries. But God wants to use our lives.

You say, "Well, I'm not that smart! I don't have any great abilities! I'm not that dynamic!" Welcome to the club. It's not abilities; it's being available. It's so very important.

These apostles lacked humility. What they talked about all the time was who was going to be the greatest one to get to heaven. Again, Jesus probably thought, Where did I find these guys?! Maybe I should have prayed a little bit longer on that mountain. The disciples asked Jesus, "Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matthew 18:1).

They also lacked faith. They freaked out in the storm on the Sea of Galilee. They were all screaming like little babies. "It is a ghost!" (Matthew 14:26). They weren't big, brave, strong apostles.

And they lacked courage. Peter was sitting by the fire when a maid servant girl said to him, "'You also were with Jesus of Galilee.' But he denied it before them all, saying, 'I do not know what you are saying'" (Matthew 26:69-70). He's freaking out! He denied the Lord three times. But Jesus restored him and commissioned him to preach the Gospel. And after being filled with the Spirit in Acts 2, he preached, and 3,000 souls were saved (Acts 2:41).

Oswald Chambers said, "God can achieve His purposes either through the absence of human power and resources or the abandonment of reliance upon them." I like that.

If you realize your weakness, and it drives you to Christ, He will use you for His glory.