

He Chose Twelve

Luke 6:12-16

In this text we have a very brief account of Jesus choosing the twelve apostles. Have you ever stopped to consider why this particular account was inspired and preserved for us? What should we learn from this text? What spiritual truth can we glean from this text to apply to our lives as we seek to walk with God in faith and obedience?

As I began to study this passage in preparation for this sermon and look closely at this list of apostles I could not help but think of I Corinthians 1:25-29, “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.”

In our text this morning we see an incredible example of how the foolishness and weakness of God is wiser and stronger than men. How not many wise or noble or mighty are called. How God chooses the foolish and weak and base and

despised things of this world to bring to nought all those things which are the pride of men.

As we study this text we ought to be moved to glorify God as we consider what he accomplished through the apostles. Not because of who they were, but in many times in spite of who they were. In this text we see God sovereignly working in the lives of sinful men to accomplish exactly what he wills. Such revelation should move us to humbly submit ourselves to him and to worship. From this passage we learn that God delights to use the weak things of this world to confound the mighty.

I. The Choosing (vs. 12-13)

The choosing began with night of prayer. This account begins by telling us that Jesus “Went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. In this night of prayer we see Jesus Christ the Son, in his humanity, demonstrate his dependence on the Father. Though truly God just as he was truly man, Jesus was not impulsive or presumptuous in his decisions. Jesus submitted to the Father’s will in all things. He only did the will of the Father. And as he approached the calling of the twelve, he spent the whole night in fervent prayer.

The next day’s work was of extreme importance. The men that Christ selected would go on to change the world. Their influence upon the world as they

were used by God would be immense and eternal. And so we see Jesus committed himself to serious prayer on this matter.

And this brings up an interesting question: To what extent was Christ's humanity informed by his divinity? There are times in the gospels when we are told Jesus knew things that only God could know. Yet as a man, Jesus prayed. There is somewhat of a spiritual mystery here in the interaction between the true humanity and true divinity of Jesus Christ.

I am reminded of Hebrews 4:14-15, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." The trials Jesus went through were genuine trials in his humanity. As genuine as is our need for prayer, so was Christ's. The pressure and the struggles and the need to seek the will and direction of God were as real in Christ's humanity as they are in our humanity. Christ endured this all for us, and emerged sinless and victorious. He is our high priest, and he has empathy for us, his people. He is touched with the feelings of our infirmities. The Creator God humbled himself and entered his creation as a man to be our redeemer, and the only appropriate response from us is to worship Him.

This commitment to prayer that we see in the life of Jesus is an example for us in decision making. Jesus carefully and prayerfully considered this choice and

then as we will see, he chose the twelve. I have taken great comfort from this passage before when wrestling with decisions. Sometimes our desire to know the specific will of God in a given situation is so great that we become paralyzed with indecision. We don't want to make the wrong choice. We don't want to mess anything up. We don't want to make a mistake that would dishonor or displease the Lord. And if we are not careful this can lead us to freeze in indecision.

Remember that God is sovereign. You do not hold the future, God does. You do not know the future, God does. Your responsibility as a free and rational creature is to glorify God. Study the Word of God, prayerfully seek His will, be actively obeying God's clearly revealed will, and if it still isn't clear what you should do in a given situation, you must make the best decision you know to make and leave the results to God.

We are responsible, but we are limited. We do not know the future and it is not given to us to know the future. We must rely on the revelation God has given us in his Word, walking in obedience to his clearly revealed will, and honestly and earnestly seeking his specific will in prayer. Just as our Lord did.

But even if we do all those things to the best of our ability, we will still sometimes make a wrong choice or a poor choice because we are limited, flawed human beings. But be encouraged, our shortcomings and failures in no way limit God or keep him from accomplishing exactly what he intends to accomplish.

Remember God's words to Job, "Who hath prevented me, that I should repay him? whatsoever is under the whole heaven is mine." (Job 41:11)

I labor this point because this is something I struggled with, especially when I was in high school and college. Sometimes we treat the will of God as if it is some sort of mystical combination of specific events and decisions. And if we get everything perfectly right, then we are walking in the "perfect will of God." This leads to overanalyzing our lives at every point and wallowing in indecision. Here is what we know about God's will for your life. It is indisputably God's will for you, Christian, to do today what you know is right based on God's Word and the Holy Spirit living within you. And then do that again tomorrow, and the day after that, and every day. If you faithfully strive to do what you know is right every day, you will be in God's will.

But you say, "What if I make a decision and everything goes wrong." If that happens to you, your responsibility on that day is the same as it is on every other day: Do what you know is right based on the Word of God and the Holy Spirit living within you. You cannot go wrong walking in obedience to the Word of God. This cannot be done flippantly. This is a very serious endeavor and requires us to be serious students of God's Word. But this is how we can know the will of God for our lives.

I believe this passage illustrates what I have been saying. In his deity, Jesus knew that Judas Iscariot was going to betray him. This is mentioned several times

in the gospels.¹ In his humanity, Jesus chose Judas Iscariot as one of the twelve apostles. From a human perspective, with the benefit of hindsight, we could say, “That was the wrong decision. That didn’t work out too well.” But from God’s perspective, this was exactly what he had ordained. What Judas intended for evil (and he did it in a perfectly free will, because he wanted to do it), God meant for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save many people. (Genesis 50:20) So Jesus prayed, all night, and then in the morning, in his humanity, he made his decision.

After this night of prayer twelve disciples were called to be apostles. Sometimes we refer to these men as the twelve disciples, but here they are specifically called apostles. There were many disciples, you and I as Christians are disciples of Jesus Christ. But these men were specifically chosen as apostles.

What is the difference between a disciple and an apostle? The word “disciple” means “One who follows one’s teaching . . . A disciple was not only a pupil, but an adherent . . . [disciples were] imitators of their teacher.”² The word “apostle” means “one sent forth.”³ An apostle is someone sent forth who is given authority and power from the sender to speak on their behalf. It is like an ambassador in modern times. The Jews used this word to refer to priests sent out by the Sanhedrin who would go throughout Israel and to the dispersed Jews. So

¹ I believe John 6:64, 70-71 is definitive. Several other passages indicate this/point to Judas directly.

² *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, Disciple, A. 1.

³ . . . , Apostle, 1.

this was a familiar concept to the Jews at this time. These 12 who had been faithful disciples, Jesus would now give them power and send them out to speak on his behalf, and this is exactly what we see at the beginning of Luke 9.

So far from this text we have considered Jesus' preparation for and then the choosing of the twelve apostles. Now let's look at this list and consider who these men were that Jesus chose.

Before I begin this section I want to say that this is only a basic overview. It is not my intention to give an in-depth profile of each of the twelve. There will be a few that we spend more time on, but this is just a quick survey. There are many excellent resources available if you want to study the lives of these men more in depth. Our focus this morning is on how God delights to use the weak things of this world to confound the mighty.

II. The Chosen (vs. 14-16)

The first man in this list is Simon Peter. Peter was one of the most prominent apostles. If you were to make a list of the most influential people in world history, even from a secular viewpoint, Peter would be very high up on that list. But who was Peter?

The only details we have in our text is that his name was Simon, Jesus named him Peter (which means "rock"), he was a disciple of Jesus before he was chosen as an apostle, and his brother was Andrew. We do find some other details

about Peter in the Bible. Before his association with Jesus, Peter was a fisherman. He was not educated, wealthy, powerful, or influential. He was just a simple fisherman.

Peter became a leader among the disciples and apostles, and later in the church. He often acted as a spokesman for the apostles. Sometimes the things Peter said were very good, such as his confession in Matthew 16:16, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

At other times Peter spoke without understanding, such as on the Mount of Transfiguration. In Luke 9:33 we read, “And it came to pass, as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: not knowing what he said.” On that occasion Peter spoke without understanding.

Sometimes Peter spoke rashly and even foolishly. In Luke 22:33 Peter rashly said, “Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death.” Just a few hours later Peter would run away when Jesus was seized by the Jews, and he would go on to deny the Lord three times that night with cursing and swearing (Mark 14:71). In Matthew 16:20 we are told that Jesus began “To shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” And in the next verse we read, “Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.” And Jesus replied to Peter, “Get thee

behind me, Satan: thou art an offense unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” On this occasion Peter spoke foolishly.

Yet Peter, with all his sin and flaws and lowly position, was one of the men chosen by Jesus to be an apostle.

Next in this list of apostles is Andrew. This text tells us even less of Andrew, just his name, that he had been a disciple of Jesus, and that he was Peter’s brother. Like Peter, he was involved in the family business as a fisherman. And also like his brother he was not educated, wealthy, powerful or influential. In the eyes of the world he was just a simple fisherman. In the gospels Andrew is notable for bringing people to Jesus. In John 1:42 we read that Andrew brought Simon (Peter) to Jesus. In John 5:8 Andrew brought the boy with 5 loaves and 2 fish to Jesus. In John 12:22 it was Andrew who went to Jesus to tell him of the Greeks who wanted to meet him. After the gospels, Andrew is mentioned in Acts 1:13 in the list of apostles, and then Scripture is silent concerning him.

Next we have James and John. Our text tells us nothing but their names. We know from Scripture that they were brothers, the sons of Zebedee. And like Peter and Andrew, they were simple fishermen. James and John were called by Jesus the “Sons of Thunder” for their tempers and inclination to boisterous behavior (Mark 3:17). In Luke 9:54, after a village of the Samaritans did not receive Jesus they asked him, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?” On that occasion Jesus had to rebuke them.

It was also James and John who asked Jesus in Mark 10:35, “Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory.” In Matthew 20:20 the mother of James and John came to Jesus with the same request. On both occasions Jesus had to deny their requests and correct the attitude of worldly ambition that motivated them.

James and John were also part of the “inner circle” of three (Peter, James, and John), who Jesus separated from the 12 on special occasions like the transfiguration or the prayer in Gethsemane.

James would become an influential figure in the early church at Jerusalem. For his powerful and faithful witness for Jesus he was the first of the 12 to be martyred. Herod Agrippa had James put to death by the sword in Jerusalem around A.D. 44 (Acts 12:2).

John is sometimes called the “beloved apostle” because of his close relationship with Jesus. He was the disciple who sat next to Jesus at the last supper. He was the disciple Jesus entrusted with the care of Mary at the crucifixion. He would become one of the most prolific authors of the New Testament, writing the Gospel of John, the three epistles which bear his name, and the book of Revelation. Again, we see God accomplished great things through two men who were simple fishermen.

Next in this list is Philip. Again, our text only gives us his name and we know very little about him from Scripture. The only detail we know about the

circumstances of his life is that he was from Bethsaida in Galilee (John 1:44).

Philip was a very practical man with a “show me” attitude. Sometimes this was good, and sometimes it was bad.

Philip was among the earliest followers of Jesus and he immediately went and told Nathanael that he had found the Messiah. When Nathanael was doubtful Philip told him, “Come and see.” (John 1:46). Philip brought the Greeks to see Jesus in John 12. This is good. May we, like Philip, be bold and faithful in bringing others to see Jesus as he is revealed in his Word and through out lives.

Philip was very practical. For example, he had already calculated the cost of feeding the 5000 before Jesus asked in John 6:7. It was Philip who said to Jesus at the last supper, “Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.” He had not realized, as Jesus told him, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” (John 14:9) The last mention we have of Philip in Scripture is in the list of the apostles in Acts 1.

Then we have Bartholomew. Bartholomew is named in all 4 lists of the 12 apostles and nowhere else. When we look at the gospels as a whole, it is believed that Bartholomew and Nathanael are the same person. Bartholomew is a surname. Nathanael is a first name. The only detail we know about his life is that he was from Cana in Galilee (John 21:2), which was a town near to Nazareth, the same town where Jesus performed his first miracle.

He was initially skeptical when Philip came and told him that he had found the Messiah, Jesus from Nazareth. In John 1:46 he said, “Can any good thing come

out of Nazareth?” But when he went to meet Jesus, Jesus said of him, “Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” (John 1:47) After the resurrection he went with Peter and some of the other apostles when they returned to fishing. The last mention of Bartholomew in Scripture is in the list of the apostles in Acts 1.

Next is Matthew. We have already spent some time dealing with Matthew in our study through Luke. In chapter 5 we read of him called by his other name, “Levi.” He was a publican, a tax-collector, and we noted the abhorrence the Jews had for publicans. They were hated. They were outcasts from Jewish society. They were numbered with the greatest of sinners. And all this was reproach they had willingly taken upon themselves for the sake of money and power and protection from Rome.

Of all the apostles, Matthew was probably the most wealthy before he was called. And based on his writing in the gospel account that bears his name, he appears to be a well-educated Jew with training and skill in record keeping. But again, he wasn't using his wealth or education for good before Jesus called him. He was a sell-out. A turncoat. A traitor to his people. He had put a higher value upon the things of this world. He was a tax collector for the Romans.

Little else is said in Scripture about Matthew. He is last mentioned in the list of apostles in Acts 1.

Now we come to Thomas. Our text only tells us his name. The only other personal detail we find in Scripture is that he was called “Didymus,” which means “double” or “twin.”

At times, Thomas showed he was very brave and devoted to Jesus. In John 11 when Jesus announced to the disciples that he was going to Bethany the other disciples protested because the Jews there had tried to kill Jesus, but Thomas said, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.” (John 11:16)

At the last supper when Jesus told his disciples, “Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know.” Thomas asked, out of an apparent desire to remain with Jesus, “Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?” (John 14:5)

But it was also Thomas who appeared the most shaken by the death of Jesus. The crucifixion seemed to crush his faith. He was not present with the other apostles when Jesus first appeared to them after his resurrection. And he did not believe that Jesus had been resurrected.

In John 20:25 he said, “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.” Eight days later, Jesus appeared again to the gathered apostles, and this time Thomas was with them. Jesus said 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.” (John 20:27)

In John 20:28 we read, “And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.” That’s a good confession, but Jesus said to him, “Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)

The last time we find Thomas mentioned in Scripture is the list of apostles in Acts 1.

Next we have the second James. In this list he is called, “James the son of Alphaeus.” That is everything the Bible tells us about this man. No specific words or acts from this James are recorded. His name is found in all the lists of the apostles, and that is all. The name Alphaeus may be familiar to you. In Mark’s account of the call of Matthew (or Levi) we are told that he was the “son of Alphaeus.” So were Matthew and this James brothers? It is possible, but Scripture does not specifically tell us.

The last mention of this James in Scripture is the list of apostles in Acts 1.

Next is Simon. Our text says, “Simon who is called Zelotes, or “Zealot.” In Matthew and Mark he is called “Simon the Canaanite.” This has nothing to do with his ancestry. That word “Canaanite” comes from the Hebrew word for “zeal.”

Simon was a zealot, but what does that mean? The zealots were a religious group among the Jews with very clear political goals. They were trying to overthrow the Roman occupation. In their religious beliefs, they aligned with the

Pharisees. But the Pharisees were willing to compromise to get things done. The Zealots did not know the meaning of the word “compromise.”

They violently opposed Roman occupation. They carried out assassinations. They burned government buildings. They attacked Roman sympathizers among the Jews. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that they were willing to suffer any death, endure any torture, and even allow their families to endure the same. They would not be deterred.

The movement started around A.D. 6, led by Judas of Galilee who is mentioned in Acts 5:37. His rebellion was crushed by the Romans and his sons were crucified. But the Romans were unable to eradicate the Zealots, they simply drove them underground. They would remain active in Israel, engaging the Romans in guerrilla warfare, until the ultimate destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.

It's amazing that a man who was a member of a group like this (today we would call them terrorists) became an apostle of Jesus Christ. A man who had hated the Romans and everyone associated with them became a co-laborer with Matthew the tax-collector. What an incredible example this is of the transcending grace of God that can transform us and that can make those who were once our enemies into our brothers and sisters in Christ. The last mention we have of Simon the Zealot in Scripture is in the list of apostles in Acts 1.

Next in the list is Judas Our text says, “Judas the brother of James.” That's the King James Version. Some other translations say, “the son of James.” It is

unclear which James this is referring to. If “brother” is correct, it is most likely referring to James the son of Alphaeus. If “son” is correct, it is probably not referring to any James found in Scripture. This is the only personal detail we find about him in the pages of Scripture.

In Matthew and Mark he is called “Lebbaeus” and “Thaddaeus.” We do have one instance of him speaking in the gospels. In John 14:19, at the last supper, Jesus told the apostles, “Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.”

In verse 22 this Judas (not Judas Iscariot) asked, “Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?” This is an honest question from Judas, but it reveals that he did not yet understand the kingdom. He was still looking for an earthly kingdom and did not understand how Jesus could reveal himself to them, and not to the whole world. In the next verse Jesus answered him, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” The kingdom of Jesus Christ at this time is not of this world, but in the hearts of men. Those who love Jesus Christ and obey him will have Jesus revealed to them.

The last mention of Judas in Scripture is in the list of apostles in Acts 1.

Finally, at the very end of this list we find Judas Isacriot. Our text says, “Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.” After Peter, Judas Iscariot is possibly the most well-known name among the apostles, but not for anything good he did.

He is infamous for his betrayal of Jesus. Every time Judas Iscariot is mentioned in Scripture, his betrayal is mentioned. He is, I believe, the greatest example found in Scripture of insincere faith. When we consider the life of Judas Iscariot it should lead us to a careful examination of our own hearts as professing Christians.

Humanly speaking, why was Judas Iscariot chosen as one of the twelve? He appeared to be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ. He must have given every outward indication of being a true, faithful, committed follower of Jesus. I believe that Judas himself believed at the time of his calling that he was a true, faithful, committed follower of Jesus.

And he did everything that a person could do, outwardly, for spiritual benefit. He was a member in good standing of a good church, so to speak. He was one of the 12 apostles. He had the best Christian association you could possibly have. He sat under the preaching of Jesus Christ. He served above and beyond with the other apostles. He was so respected and trusted that he held the purse. He was the treasurer. He had the money. It was so inconceivable to the other apostles that Judas Iscariot could betray Jesus, that even when Jesus indicated that Judas would betray him at the last supper, and then Judas immediately left the other apostles thought, "Oh, he must be going to buy something we need or pay the bill." (John 18:29) Judas Iscariot gave every outward indication of being a model Christian.

Yet what happened to Judas Iscariot? As our text says, he was "the traitor." He betrayed his master. He sold Jesus for 30 pieces of silver. And then, after Jesus

was condemned, in the agony of his guilt, he committed suicide. In the end, Judas was proven to be one of those who cried, “Lord, Lord!” but whom Jesus never knew.

These are the 12 apostles. We know almost nothing about many of them. And when we do know something about them, we find that they were poor, ignorant, weak, sinful men. These were not the cream of the crop which Israel had to offer. These were fishermen and tax-collectors and zealots. And yet these men, this most unlikely, rag-tag group God used to turn the world upside down. God delights to use the weak things of this world to confound the mighty.

As we close, what application should we make to ourselves? First, take warning from Judas Iscariot. You can look like a Christian. You can talk like a Christian. You can walk where Christians walk. You can be a member of the best church and sit under the best teachers. You can be involved in ministry. You can fool everyone, even yourself. But in the end still be a traitor to Jesus Christ.

Scripture tells us to examine ourselves, to see whether we are in the faith (II Cor. 13:5). In whom are you trusting? On whom do you rely on for your salvation? Many times the board way runs parallel to the narrow path, but the narrow path leads to life everlasting and the broad way leads to eternal destruction. Do you have assurance that you are on the narrow path, that you are a true follower of Jesus Christ and not a traitor to Him?

Nothing is more important to know than this. Don't let this matter rest. I implore you, if you are not sure, set up a time to meet with one of the elders or a faithful brother or sister in Christ. Seek the Lord while he may be found. Take warning from Judas Iscariot.

Second, Christian, be encouraged and convicted by this truth: God delights to use the weak things of this world to confound the mighty. There is never an excuse to not serve the Lord. You cannot say, "I'm not gifted. I'm not strong enough. I'm not wealthy enough. I'm not good enough." If that's the way you feel, I've got good news from I Corinthians 1:26: not many wise, not many might, not many noble are called. God has chosen to use the weak things of this world. If God could use the the twelve men that are listed in our text, he can certainly use you. Go forward Christian, and serve the Lord.