

To Seek and To Save the Lost

The Twelve Apostles

Luke 6:12-16

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The Twelve Apostles

Scripture

Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. He was about thirty years of age when he began his public ministry (Luke 3:23) in 28 AD. His ministry of seeking and saving the lost was primarily a ministry of teaching and healing.

As Jesus carried out his itinerant ministry in Israel his popularity with the people grew. But, as his popularity grew, so did opposition to his ministry, which came primarily from the religious leaders.

About six months after the start of Jesus' public ministry, opposition to his ministry escalated. Jesus was aware that the religious leaders discussed with one another what they might do with him (Luke 6:11). And so Jesus decided that it was time to choose twelve men whom he could equip to carry on his mission after his departure.

So, let's read about Jesus choosing the twelve apostles in Luke 6:12-16:

¹²In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. ¹³And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. (Luke 6:12-16)

Introduction

It is common to name major structures such as buildings, bridges, roads, airports, etc. after a person. The person after

whom a structure is named may be famous, deceased, wealthy, or so on. Usually the person after whom the structure is named has made a significant contribution in some way, and the community recognizes that person's contribution by naming the structure after him or her.

So, for example, we have Kennedy Airport in New York, Reagan Airport in Washington, Sears Tower in Chicago, Lincoln Highway in Indiana, George Washington Bridge in New Jersey, and so on.

It seems that almost everywhere one looks, one sees a name on the wall of a building. Just yesterday I was at a local hospital, and the name of one person was in large letters on one building, and the name of a different person was in even larger letters on the next building!

I suppose it would be an honor to have a structure named after one, wouldn't it? But, after a period of time the structure will come down and a different one will be erected with a different person's name on it. Nothing is permanent in this world.

However, did you know that in heaven there are twenty-four names inscribed on the holy city of Jerusalem? Those names will be there for the rest of eternity! Listen to the apostle John's description of it in Revelation 21:10–14:

¹⁰ And he [i.e., one of the seven angels] carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and *on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—* ¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and *on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

This is a remarkable honor that is given to the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve apostles of Jesus whose names are inscribed on the gates and wall's foundations.

While they were alive they did not know that this was the destiny that God had ordained for them. And yet it was.

Jesus selected twelve men to be his apostles. He knew that they would endure poverty, hunger, sorrow, and even persecution in their service to him. And yet, in order to accomplish his mission of seeking and saving the lost, he needed to equip the twelve to carry on his mission after his departure.

In today's lesson we learn about Jesus choosing the twelve apostles.

Lesson

The analysis of Jesus choosing the twelve apostles as set forth in Luke 6:12-16 will show us that Jesus uses ordinary people to accomplish his purposes.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The Preparation for Jesus' Choice (6:12)
2. The Purpose of Jesus' Choice (6:13)
3. The Persons of Jesus' Choice (6:14-16)

I. The Preparation for Jesus' Choice (6:12)

First, let's look at the preparation for Jesus' choice.

Luke said in verse 12 that **in these days Jesus went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God.**

Luke regularly noted Jesus' commitment to prayer. Earlier, after a busy night of healing and casting demons out of people in Capernaum, Luke said that "when it was day, [Jesus] departed and went into a desolate place" (4:42). Luke did not specifically state that Jesus prayed; it is likely that he assumed

his readers would know this. Instead, Mark tells us in his Gospel that Jesus prayed there (Mark 1:35).

Later, Luke explicitly stated that Jesus went to desolate places in order to pray. After healing a man of leprosy, “great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities. But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray” (Luke 5:15–16).

Jesus understood that his mission of seeking and saving the lost required his total dependence upon his heavenly Father for success. And so he spent large amounts of time in personal prayer communing with his Father.

Jesus also understood that his mission of seeking and saving the lost required him to select twelve men who were central to God’s plan of salvation. These twelve men were to be the new covenant parallel to the old covenant sons of Israel. They would become the foundation of the new covenant church (see Revelation 21:10-14).

These twelve men would enter into an intensive internship with Jesus. They would spend several years with him. They would walk with him, watch him, learn from him, and serve with him. At the end of their internship they would witness his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. Then they would know for sure that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Savior of sinners. And then they would go into the entire world and preach the good news of salvation to all nations.

And so Jesus’ choice of twelve men was critical to the success of his mission. Therefore, **all night he continued in prayer to God.**

Why did Jesus spend **all night** in prayer with his heavenly Father? He did so because the choice of the twelve men was so important. Even though Jesus was God in human form, he placed the exercise of his attributes at the discretion of his Father. He did not possess all knowledge. He needed the Father to help him know whom to select to be one of the twelve.

Even though Jesus had only been engaged in public ministry for about six months, he already had a growing number of followers (see Luke 5:10-11; 5:27). These followers were called *disciples*.

So, Jesus spent **all night** in prayer to God, his Father in heaven. It is conceivable that in his prayer Jesus presented each one of his disciples to his Father so that the Father would give him a sense of confirmation about who was to become one of the twelve. Three years later, on the night before he died, Jesus would lift the twelve to his Father in prayer saying, "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word" (John 17:6, *NIV*).

Prayer was of vital importance to Jesus. He demonstrated that prayer was his lifeline to his heavenly Father. He said in John 8:28b-29, "I do nothing on my own authority, but speak just as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me. He has not left me alone, for I always do the things that are pleasing to him."

Jesus' example teaches us our own great need for prayer. If Jesus, the sinless Son of God, spent time in prayer, thus demonstrating his total dependence upon God, then so do we.

We need to pray when we face big decisions in our lives. We need to spend time with our heavenly Father, seeking his will for our lives. One commentator says, "Too often we engage not in *dependent* prayer but in *obligatory or routine* prayer."¹ And then he says, "What folly if we frame our lives with prayer as window dressing but do not really pray. What arrogance to understand Jesus' necessity but reject it for ourselves!"²

We also need to pray for the work of the church, just as Jesus did. His example shows us the priority of prayer in carry-

¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know the Truth*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 207.

² R. Kent Hughes, 207.

ing the gospel forward into the entire world. Again, if Jesus, the sinless Son of God, spent time in prayer, thus demonstrating his total dependence upon God, then so do we. If Jesus began his mission with prayer, how can we expect to accomplish anything at all without prayer? As another commentator says, “We are never more like Jesus than when we get down on our knees to pray for people to go into the world and preach the gospel.”³ Therefore, I invite you to join me on Wednesday evenings, beginning on September 18, at 6:30 p.m. to pray for people to go into the world and preach the gospel.

II. The Purpose of Jesus’ Choice (6:13)

Second, notice the purpose of Jesus’ choice.

Luke said in verse 13 that **when day came, Jesus called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles.**

A *disciple* is “someone who follows another person or another way of life and who submits himself to the discipline (teaching) of that leader or way.”⁴ In the Bible the term *disciple* is found almost exclusively in the Gospels and the book of Acts. Basically, “wherever there is a teacher and those taught, the idea of discipleship is present.”⁵ So, Jesus was the teacher and those who put his teaching into practice were his **disciples**.

From this group of **his disciples** Jesus **chose twelve, whom he named apostles**. Clearly, **apostles** were distinguished from **disciples**. The Greek word for apostle (*apostello*) comes from a verb that means “to send.” Therefore, an *apostle* is “a person sent by another, a messenger, an envoy.”⁶

³ Phillip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Volume 1*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, NJ, 2009), 255.

⁴ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 629.

⁵ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, 629.

⁶ M. G. Easton, *Easton’s Bible Dictionary* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893).

The word *apostle* is used once in the Bible to describe Jesus himself. Jesus is “the *apostle* and high priest of our confession” (Hebrews 3:1). That is, Jesus was sent by his Father to seek and to save the lost (Luke 19:10). Just as his Father called and sent Jesus, so Jesus called and sent the twelve to carry on the mission that had been entrusted to him by his Father.

What qualified the **twelve** to serve as **apostles**? They were all **disciples** of Jesus. That is, they were all followers of Jesus. But, there were two necessary requirements for a person to be called as an apostle. First, Jesus specifically called a person to serve as an apostle (Matthew 10:1-7; Galatians 1:1). And second, an apostle had to see Jesus alive after his resurrection (Acts 1:22; 1 Corinthians 9:1; 15:7-9).⁷

The **twelve, whom Jesus named apostles**, were going to be sent by Jesus to represent him in proclaiming the good news of the gospel to all nations. They were going to be sent by Jesus to be his official messengers. One commentator says, “In effect, by ordaining these twelve men, God was establishing a new Israel. Just as the twelve sons of Jacob founded the Old Testament people of God, so also the apostles established the foundation for God’s new people in Christ.”⁸

Jesus’ choice of the **twelve, whom he named apostles**, was unique. They and they alone were chosen to represent Jesus. They were to be the foundation upon which Jesus built his church. And since a building can have only one foundation, their ministry cannot be repeated.

Nevertheless, in a secondary, non-technical sense all Christians are sent by Jesus into the world to represent him. In fact, when Jesus met with the apostles and disciples after his resurrection, he said to them, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you” (John 20:21).

All Christians have been called Jesus. We have been called

⁷ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2157.

⁸ Phillip Graham Ryken, 256.

to faith in him. Not one of us called ourselves to follow Jesus. Instead, he called us and we responded in faith to his call.

And we have also been called to serve Jesus in some particular ministry. Just as Jesus called each apostle to serve him as an apostle, Jesus also calls every Christian to some form of service. That means that every Christian must be involved in some kind of ministry. If you are not active in a ministry, know that you are not heeding Jesus' call to service. If you are not yet active in ministry, let an elder or ministry leader know that you want to obey Jesus' call and serve him in a particular ministry.

III. The Persons of Jesus' Choice (6:14-16)

Finally, let's look at the persons of Jesus' choice.

Luke said that Jesus chose **Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor** (6:14-16).

Luke 6:14-16 is one of four New Testament lists of the twelve, the others being Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, and Acts 1:13. These lists have three points of agreement:

- (1) Peter is always listed first and Judas is always listed last (except in Acts 1:13 where Judas is omitted because he is dead).
- (2) The first four are always Peter, Andrew, James, and John, though not always in the same order.
- (3) There are three groups of four, with the lead position in each group always occupied by Peter, Philip, and James the son of Alphaeus.⁹

Of the twelve, **Peter** is the key figure. He often speaks for

⁹ Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 1:1-9:50*, vol. 1, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 543.

the apostles and takes a leadership role.

Peter's brother, **Andrew**, is hardly discussed outside the lists.

The sons of Zebedee, **James** and **John**, complete the initial group and the sequence of four fishermen.

In the second group, **Philip** is mentioned separately only a few times in John's Gospel.

Bartholomew may well be the same person as Nathaniel in John 1:45, since many Jews had two prominent names.

Matthew is also known as Levi, the tax collector.

Thomas is the apostle who will have to be convinced of Jesus' resurrection (John 20:24-29).

In the third group, we know very little about **James the son of Alphaeus**.

Simon who was called the Zealot was a political nationalist before meeting Jesus.

Judas the son of James may be Thaddaeus in the other lists.

And finally, there is **Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor** when he betrayed Jesus to the religious leaders for thirty pieces of silver.

This group of men formed the nucleus of Jesus' ministry team. They were a diverse group of ordinary men. Jesus did not select a homogenous group of men to serve as his apostles. There were fishermen, tax collectors, a staunchly political person, and a few others we don't know much about. They were everyday sorts of people, showing the grassroots nature of Jesus' ministry.

By looking at the twelve Jesus chose to be his apostles, we learn that:

- Jesus builds his church from people of different temperaments and backgrounds.
- Jesus calls the unexpected and unlikely to carry out his mission.

- Jesus transforms people in the course of serving him.
- Jesus equips those he calls to serve him.
- Jesus brings out the best in those who serve him.
- Jesus allows for false individuals among those who claim to serve him.¹⁰

Judas Iscariot eventually betrayed Jesus. Jesus' choice of him was not a mistake because the betrayal by **Judas Iscariot** was part of God's plan for the death of Jesus (cf. John 17:12), and therefore for the salvation of sinners. After **Judas Iscariot** committed suicide, he was replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:26).

Well, as you know, Jesus trained the twelve apostles for a period of three years. After his ascension, and after Matthias replaced Judas Iscariot, they went into the entire world and preached the good news of salvation to all nations. All of them, with the exception of John, died a martyr's death in their faithful service to Jesus.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed Jesus choosing the twelve apostles as set forth in Luke 6:12-16, we should put our trust in Jesus so that his Spirit can do his work of ministry through us.

Jesus chose twelve disciples to be his apostles. They were called to a unique office. They were nobodies when he called them. They become somebodies because of their faithful service to him.

Today, Jesus calls us to be his disciples. And he calls us to serve him. He calls us to proclaim to the world that he is still seeking and saving the lost. Let us heed his call and serve him faithfully, even as the apostles did. Amen.

¹⁰ Douglas J. W. Milne, *Let's Study Luke* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2005), 81-82.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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PRAYER:

Our Father, thank you for Luke's account of Jesus choosing the apostles. We learn so much from his account.

Enable us to pray with fervency and commitment. May our prayers not be routine or perfunctory.

And help every one here today to serve you in some particular ministry. You have not called any one of us merely to receive a ticket to heaven. You have called each one of us to serve you in the building of your church.

And if there is anyone here today who does not yet know you as Lord and Savior, would you grant that person faith in Jesus?

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

BENEDICTION:

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

CHARGE:

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve God wholeheartedly!