

Jesus Chooses The Twelve Apostles

Luke 6:12-36

Key Verse: 6:13

"When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles...."

This passage tells us how Jesus chose and began to train the twelve apostles. In the future, Jesus would send them to the ends of the earth to proclaim the gospel. Of course, Jesus did the main work. Jesus died on the cross for our sins, rose again from the dead, and destroyed the power of sin, death and the devil forever. So Jesus said, "It is finished." However, in order to spread the good news of his eternal victory, Jesus called and sent apostles to all nations. Therefore, the choosing and training of these twelve men was vitally important to gospel ministry. In this passage we can learn how Jesus chose them and whom he chose. We can also learn what attitude apostles must have, and what is most essential for them to learn. In modern terms, apostles are missionaries or international servants of God. According to Romans 1:5, we have all received grace and apostleship. Today let's learn how to fulfill our high calling from Jesus.

I. Jesus chose twelve and designated them apostles (12-16)

In this part we can learn how Jesus chose the twelve, what kind of people they were, and Jesus' hope for them.

First, Jesus prayed to God all night (12). As we saw in the last passage, Jesus was in a heartbreaking situation. The Jewish leaders had become enemies of God, and a hindrance to gospel ministry. Ordinary people were suffering, in need of a true shepherd. Jesus wanted to care for them endlessly, but it was obvious that his days on earth were limited. He had to carry out God's will through his death. It was time to choose disciples and train them to carry on after him. Who would he choose for this task? How would he prepare them? Jesus did not decide these things by himself. Jesus went to God in prayer. Look at verse 12. "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God." Jesus listened to God in prayer all night long. Jesus found strength in God. Jesus found wisdom in God.

Here we must acknowledge that it is God who chooses and calls Jesus' disciples. Jesus knew that his disciples belonged to God (Jn 17:6b). They had been entrusted to him for a time, to learn obedience to God's word. But it was God who chose Jesus' disciples. God chooses by his one-sided grace and for his own purpose. Therefore, those chosen as his disciples must know that they did not choose God, but God chose them. We must realize that it is a great privilege to be chosen by God, and thank God. Moreover, in making disciples as Jesus commanded, we must respect God's sovereignty and pray. Raising disciples is not a human business; it is God's work. Many of us believe that God will use us to raise Jesus' disciples in North America. This will not be done by our own plan or wisdom, but only by God's will. So we must pray a lot, and follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We must not work by human ambition, but through much prayer. When we pray to God wholeheartedly, like Jesus did, God will raise his disciples among us.

Second, Jesus chose twelve apostles (13-16). Look at verse 13. "When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles...." After much prayer, Jesus chose twelve apostles from among many disciples. The number twelve is significant. When God began to raise a holy nation, he chose the twelve sons of Jacob as his people. Now, Jesus was making a new beginning. Jesus chose twelve apostles. Jesus had a sense of God's history, but he also made a clear break with the old system. Jesus started an entirely new movement. This may be why his disciples were working class people without formal religious training.

There is another, more practical reason for choosing twelve apostles. It was to form a community in which each one could have intimate fellowship with Jesus. If there were more than twelve, they would not be able to know Jesus as personally. Discipleship requires intimacy with Christ. At the same time, discipleship is done in groups. There is both an individual component, and a collective component. As we know, one-to-one Bible study is excellent for helping us to struggle with the word of God personally. However, it is not sufficient to raise disciples. Small group fellowship that enhances community learning is also very important. We need to do both: struggle personally with God's word and have fellowship in small groups as well.

When Jesus chose the twelve, he gave them a privileged status. They were designated as apostles. They would have special access to him in his most significant teachings and experiences. In the future, he would recognize them as legitimate carriers of his message, and as his representatives on earth. They would be the unique authors of the New Testament. Innumerable people would learn of Jesus through them. With their privilege came a responsibility to conform precisely to Jesus' will. They would be measured by a high standard. Who, then, were these men?

* "Simon (whom he named Peter)." Simon was passionate and somewhat outspoken. He seemed to be a natural leader. However, he had obvious weaknesses and made big mistakes. He seemed too unstable to be a truly effective leader. However, Jesus had a great hope for him from the very first day he saw him. Jesus gave him the name "Peter," which means "Rock." It meant he would be the rock of Jesus' church. Peter's virtue was that he was willing to obey Jesus, simply because Jesus said so. This is an essential quality that enabled him to grow in Jesus. However, it was Jesus' deep grace of restoration that sustained Peter through his failures. In Jesus' hope and deep grace, Simon did become Peter, the rock of the early church.

* "his brother Andrew." Andrew is referred to as "Peter's brother." We may wonder how Andrew felt about this. According to John, Andrew brought Peter to Jesus. After that, Jesus paid most of his attention to Peter, and not much to Andrew. But Andrew did not mind. Andrew was not self-centered. Andrew was most cooperative. When Jesus wanted to feed a large crowd, Andrew understood Jesus' heart and brought five loaves and two fish to Jesus. Quiet men of good influence, like Andrew, are precious in God's work.

* "James, John." They were brothers, the sons of Zebedee. Together with Simon and Andrew, they formed the nucleus of Jesus' band of disciples. But there was tension among them, and a running competition over who was number one. Once, when Jesus was nearing Jerusalem to suffer and die for sinners, James and John tried to claim positions at his right and left hand. It

was a shameless power play that upset all of the other disciples. But Jesus taught them his humble servanthship and his spirit of sacrifice. Finally they became the most sacrificial men of God. James was the first martyr among the twelve. John became the disciple of love, and a blessing to everyone.

* "Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas." Philip was especially sought out by Jesus, as John records. Bartholomew may be the same person as Nathanael, whom Philip brought to Jesus. Tradition says that after Christ had risen, Philip and Bartholomew coworked in various places, including Hierapolis, and that each died as a martyr. We met Matthew in chapter 5. Thomas was sick with doubt. But Jesus healed him and he became a witness of the resurrection. Later, he went to India as a missionary.

* "James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." James son of Alphaeus might have been Matthew's brother. Simon the Zealot was a member of the nationalist party of Israel. He must have had a hard time getting along with Matthew. Judas son of James may be the son of Apostle James. Judas Iscariot became a traitor. Judas was called, chosen, loved and trained by Jesus, just as the others were. He alone failed to become a great man of God. According to John's gospel, it was because he loved money more than Jesus. He stands as a warning to us not to love money, or the world, more than Jesus. Jesus knew that Judas would betray him. Still Jesus chose him. Jesus did not avoid the cross in choosing his apostles. Jesus followed God's will.

Among the twelve were people of various backgrounds, experiences and personalities. By choosing them, Jesus embraced each kind of person in an intimate and special way. This reveals Jesus' heart; Jesus embraces all kinds of people in the hope of raising them as great men of God. Everyone has hope in Jesus. Any kind of person can find a place in Jesus. This challenges us to learn Jesus' heart. Generally, we like to be with those we like, and to avoid those who make us uncomfortable. But Jesus spent time in fellowship with every kind of person, even a traitor. We should embrace many kinds of people. Then we can know the heart of Christ. Here we should thank God for the people in our lives who are contrary to us and most difficult to get along with. They are helping us to grow in the heart of Christ.

Most of all, we learn Jesus' great hope. Jesus chose ordinary men. Yet Jesus believed that they would become apostles who would bring the gospel to the world. And they did. Tradition tells us that each one preached the gospel powerfully and sealed his testimony with martyrdom, except John. Jesus chooses the weak things of the world and uses them powerfully in history. In Jesus we have hope to be used greatly by God. We must live in this hope instead of in frustration and despair. We must also learn to see others with hope, and to invite them to Jesus. Jesus can raise weak people as great servants of God, and a blessing to the world.

II. Jesus teaches a basic attitude and the essence of discipleship (17-36)

In this part, we can see Luke's unique perspective in regards to the training of the twelve apostles. In parallel passages, Matthew and Mark state that Jesus gave his apostles authority to preach and to drive out demons. However, Luke omits this and goes directly to Jesus' high standard of spiritual and moral life. Luke teaches us that Jesus' apostles must have godly character. Then their message will be powerful and effective.

Verses 17-19 reveal the background of Jesus' disciple raising ministry. Jesus took his disciples to a level place, surrounded by a needy crowd of people from all over Judea, and from the coastal towns of Tyre and Sidon, which were in Gentile territory. These people were thirsty for the word of God. They needed help to solve serious problems: diseases, sicknesses, and demon possession. Under Roman rule, people's lives were hard. In their agony, many despaired and became ungodly. They needed shepherds. Jesus became their shepherd. Jesus welcomed them with compassion and healed them all with his power. Yet, in spite of their great need, Jesus also began to teach his disciples. Obviously, Jesus considered disciple raising a priority. So in the midst of a great demand from the crowd, Jesus raised disciples. We have to struggle hard just to survive. We face overwhelming demands. However, disciple raising must be a priority, and for this we must sacrifice.

In verses 20-26, Jesus sets forth the standard that his disciples must live by. Jesus taught them clearly what kind of life was blessed and what kind of life resulted in woes. Let's consider Jesus' teachings prayerfully.

Look at verse 20. "Looking at his disciples, he said: 'Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.'" Jesus' disciples were poor. They had quit their full-time jobs and left everything to follow Jesus. But Jesus did not promise them any pay, not even lunch money. Jesus emphasized that the poor life is the blessed life. However, many people think, "Blessed are the rich...." Many are crazy for money. But riches deceive people. Riches make people so proud that they ignore God and his kingdom. When UBF ministry began in Russia in the late 1980's, Russian students were poor and they eagerly sought God and his kingdom. But twenty years later, after the nation has gotten richer, not nearly as many students come to God. Jesus told his disciples that they were blessed. Instead of having the small, temporary power of money, they experienced God's kingdom expanding, driving out darkness, and bringing righteousness and peace. What is more, they would enjoy the kingdom of God forever. In this time of economic hardship, many crave money. However, as Jesus' disciples, we must regard the poor life as a blessing, and enjoy the kingdom of God.

Look at verse 21. "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh." Jesus' disciples would be hungry. They missed many meals to keep up with Jesus. But they learned to eat the Bread of Life which satisfies both body and soul forever. Jesus' disciples would weep. Sometimes it was because they missed their moms. Sometimes it was because they suffered to bear with one another. Mostly it was because of their own sins. But in the end, all their sorrows would turn to joy and they would laugh loudly, from their hearts.

Look at verses 22-23. "Blessed are you when men hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their fathers treated the prophets." We human beings have a natural desire to be accepted and liked by others. However, Jesus was hated and rejected by people who were under the devil's power. Jesus' disciples would experience the same treatment. No one wants to be hated and rejected. However, Jesus' disciples must not feel sorry for themselves. They must rejoice and leap for joy. It is the sign that they are standing on the side of God, and they have a great reward in heaven.

In verses 24-26, Jesus pronounced woe to the rich, the well fed, those who laugh, and those spoken well of by all men. Just as there are blessings, there are also woes. Those who are not blessed will be people of woes. There is no middle ground. Jesus taught his disciples the only blessed life. In this part, we learn a basic attitude as Jesus' disciples: 1) We must willingly endure sufferings to learn of Jesus and become like him; 2) Our great reward is in the kingdom of God, not in this world.

In verses 27-36, Jesus teaches his disciples to grow in the character and attributes of God. He began with one word: Love. Look at verse 27. "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you...." Jesus challenged his disciples to love their enemies. We human beings like the Old Testament law, "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." When enemies attack, we want to repay them. But Jesus challenges us to practice the love of God. God loved us while we were still his enemies. Jesus prayed for his enemies from the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." Jesus wants us to practice this love of God in our daily lives. This is the essence of discipleship.

America witnessed this kind of love from the Amish not long ago. On October 2, 2006, a troubled milk-truck driver from a neighboring town stormed into a one-room Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. He was armed with two guns. He drove out the young men and boys and barricaded the doors. Then he lined the young girls against the wall and shot them, execution style. He killed five and wounded others, and then took his own life. This town had been peaceful and orderly; nothing like that had ever happened before. Parents, friends, teachers, and community members were shocked and broken-hearted. They grieved deeply. However, they did not react with vengeance. Instead, they forgave the killer. They reached out to his family members to comfort them. In fact, a day after attending the funerals of their slain children, they attended the funeral of the killer. Their women hugged his widow and cried together with her. They all prayed for her and her family. How could they do this? They had the love of God in their hearts. The world could not ignore their testimony. Many members of the media plainly reported how they forgave their enemies. In this way the Amish revealed God's love to the world without preaching.

Jesus concluded in verse 31. "Do to others as you would have them do to you." Jesus' people are not just talkers, but doers. We must treat others, even our enemies, with the same love and understanding we ourselves want.

In verses 32-34, Jesus explains that loving those who love us is nothing special. Gang members love their fellow gang members. But loving enemies is different. It reveals the character of God. Let's read verse 35. "But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked."

Look at verse 36. "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." Here we see that Jesus wanted his disciples to grow into God's likeness. When they practiced the love and mercy of God, they could testify to the gospel truth with their lives, as well as with their mouths. Dr. Martin Luther King was a shepherd for America in the 1960's. He challenged the racial prejudice which dehumanized his own African American people. He knew he was risking his life. But he boldly led nonviolent demonstrations to bring darkness to light and to create an America in which all people, of every color and background, could live side by side in love and respect. His message had power to move people's hearts. It was not just because he spoke well, but because he practiced the love of Christ in risking his life to save his people.

Here we must ask, "Am I growing in the love of God? Is my love superior to that of gang members?" Jesus wants us to love all kinds of people with the love of God, even our enemies. Therefore, we must love Muslims with the love of God and pray for them. Our prayer should not merely come from fear that they will take over. We should truly love them and want them to be saved by Jesus. When we love our enemies and are merciful to the undeserving, we are children of God, and can be useful servants of God.

Through this study we realize that Jesus calls his apostles to a high standard. It seems too high. We cannot live up to it naturally. However, let's accept Jesus' standard by faith and pray for his help. As he changed his apostles, he

can change us. When we grow in God's character, North America will become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.