

JESUS CHOOSES THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Luke 6:12-26

Key Verse: 6:13

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

In the last passage we learned that Jesus, the Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath. Jesus is the Creator God who made the heavens and the earth and all things for his own glory. On the Lord’s day we must worship Jesus from our hearts in spirit and truth. When we do so, we can find true rest for our souls. However, some dutiful people come to church on Sunday, sit through the worship service with a frowning face, then go home without remembering what the message was about. They do not find rest for their souls; their thirst for worldly pleasure does not subside at all. True worship comes from the heart. It is to recognize Jesus as the Creator God and to thank him for giving us life and the privilege to live in his world—no matter how difficult our present situation may be. It is to listen to his word and obey him. It is to repent of our sins and accept his grace of forgiveness. It is also to serve others with genuine compassion. Then we can find true rest for our souls and be happy to live a holy life in this corrupted generation. Jesus, the Lord of the Sabbath, gives us true rest and enables us to work hard for his glory.

In today’s passage Jesus chooses his twelve apostles. It is a most important event in Jesus’ ministry and in the history of gospel work down through the generations. Many sitting here are named after Jesus’ apostles: Peter, Andrew, John. Even many unbelieving people name their children after Jesus’ apostles. As we study this passage we want to understand why Jesus chose the Twelve. We also want to learn what kind of persons Jesus chose. May God grant us the heart of Jesus who chose and raised twelve apostles through this study.

First, Jesus chose the twelve (12-13).

As we have studied, Jesus began his earthly messianic ministry by healing the sick, driving out evil spirits from anguished souls, and preaching the good news of the kingdom of God. But the Jewish religious leaders were not happy about it. They opposed Jesus’ life-giving ministry in the name of Jewish law. To them, Jesus revealed his identity as the Lord of the Sabbath. To them, Jesus showed the compassion of God to heal a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath. But their response was to become furiously mad, and they began to plot what they might do to Jesus.

At that time, Jesus might have felt a premonition of his inevitable suffering and death on the cross. Jesus would become the Lamb of God who shed his blood for the sin of the world. This was God’s will. Through Jesus’ death and resurrection, the power of sin and death would be destroyed and all who believed in him would receive forgiveness of sins, eternal life and the kingdom of God as their inheritance. Yet, in his humanity, it was not easy for Jesus to bear this burden. Who wants to be rejected? Who wants to die? What did Jesus do?

Look at verse 12. “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.” Jesus left the busy crowd of people. Jesus transcended the dark activity of the religious leaders. Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray. Jesus came to God in prayer. Through prayer, Jesus could listen to God and rest in God. Through prayer, Jesus could renew his mission as the Messiah. Through prayer, Jesus found God’s strength. Through prayer, Jesus found God’s wisdom: It was to choose apostles at this time. Jesus’ choosing the twelve apostles was done through prayer. Jesus’ choosing the twelve apostles was not merely a good human idea or a brilliant business decision. It was God’s wisdom that came from Jesus’ all-night prayer before the task of world salvation.

Look at verse 13. “When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles....” Jesus had a large crowd of many disciples at that time. What is a disciple? Simply speaking, a disciple is a learner or student whose goal is to master the main thought of his teacher and apply it in his lifestyle. The disciples of Jesus had seen the compassion and power of God Almighty in Jesus. Their hearts were moved by Jesus’ words and actions as he preached the good news and healed the sick. They followed him to learn from him and to participate in his earthly messianic ministry. They wanted to become like Jesus. This requires inner transformation.

Jesus' ministry was very popular. Jesus had many disciples. But he did not choose all of them to be his apostles. He did not train all of them. After prayer, he chose twelve of them. These twelve were designated apostles. The Greek word translated "apostle" literally means "one sent out." The word "apostle" is similar to the word "missionary" in our time. In the future Jesus would send them out. To do what? To preach the gospel of his death and resurrection to the whole world. Just before his ascension, Jesus told his disciples: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Ac 1:8). Jesus would die and rise again according to the Scriptures. Then these twelve men would preach the gospel to the ends of the earth. They would also raise disciples who would preach the gospel to the end of time.

Jesus' choosing the twelve apostles came from the love of God to save all peoples on earth from their sins. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life." The Risen Jesus told his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). To participate in Jesus' work we must know the love of God for all peoples of all nations. Without the love of God, we are useless. May God help each of us to have the love of God in our hearts.

Second, the twelve apostles (14-16).

As we have studied, Jesus chose his apostles to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth. Jesus chose his apostles to express God's love to all peoples in the world who were suffering in their sins. Jesus' apostles must be truly great international leaders. They were more important than all the politicians and educators, both then and now. Then what kind of persons did Jesus choose? Look at verses 14-16. "Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." To our surprise, Jesus chose pretty ordinary people. They seemed to have been working class people. Their resumes would not be so impressive. None of them were enrolled in religious training classes. But when we carefully study these verses we learn that they were transformed by Jesus' love and prayer into great servants of God.

First on the list was Simon. By occupation he was a fisherman. As we studied in chapter 5, he was diligent and hardworking. He was humble enough to listen to Jesus' words and obey them even though they contradicted his common sense and experience as a fisherman. Through his obedience to Jesus' word, Simon came to know that he was a sinner. Through his obedience to Jesus' word, Simon came to know that Jesus is the holy Son of God. Then Jesus forgave his sins and put hope in him, saying, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men" (5:10). After that, Simon pulled his boat up on shore, left everything and followed Jesus.

Jesus named him Peter, which means "rock." Among the twelve apostles, Peter was the first to make a confession of faith in Jesus, saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Then Jesus told Peter, "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Mt 16:16,18). Jesus made Peter the rock or foundation of his church. Jesus chose Peter with this purpose from the beginning. This hope and purpose of Jesus never changed, even though Peter had his ups and downs. Once Peter made a big mistake. When Jesus began to predict his suffering, death and resurrection, Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. But Jesus did not give up on Peter. Jesus devoted the latter part of his earthly ministry to helping Peter repent of his human thinking and to accept Jesus' death and resurrection personally. On the night Jesus was crucified, Peter denied Jesus three times. Even then, Jesus did not give up on him. Jesus looked straight at him. Then Peter realized his sin and repented with bitter tears (Lk 22:62). Finally, Peter accepted Jesus' death and resurrection in his heart. He became a great shepherd for the early church with the image of Jesus, who gave his life for the flock of God's sheep.

Peter became the rock of Jesus' church for world salvation work. It was not because of his human qualities, but because of his obedience to Jesus' words and his repentant heart. Obedience and repentance are the essential qualities that Jesus' disciples must have. We learn from Jesus the importance of one person. Jesus labored for one person Simon with tears, prayer and blood-shedding effort until he was changed into Peter, the Rock. Likewise, we must labor for one person at a time through faithful one-to-one Bible study. We must do so in the hope of Jesus with long-suffering patience until his people are transformed into spiritual leaders. In this way, may God make America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Second on the list was Andrew. He may be the most underrated disciple of Jesus down through the generations. He was originally one of John the Baptist's disciples. He recognized Jesus as the Lamb of God based on John's testimony and followed Jesus. After just one day together, he found that Jesus is the promised Messiah. Then he "fished" his brother Peter and brought him to Jesus. After that, Jesus didn't pay much attention to Andrew and only talked about Peter all the time. But Andrew didn't mind. He was happy just to see Jesus' ministry prosper. He was happy when God blessed his brother Peter abundantly. He may have understood the heart of Jesus the best. Once, when Jesus wanted to feed five thousand people after intensive Bible study, he said to his disciples, "You give them something to eat" (Mk 6:37). The other disciples were shocked and their jaws dropped to the ground. But Andrew looked around here and there until he found a boy with five loaves and two fish. He brought these to Jesus, believing Jesus could use them to feed five thousand people. Jesus was pleased by Andrew's shepherd heart and performed a miracle. In this age of self-promotion, people like Andrew are overlooked. But in Jesus' ministry, people like Andrew are very precious indeed.

Next on the list were James and John. They were brothers and had been Peter's coworkers in the Galilean fishing business. Outwardly, they seemed to accept Peter's leadership. But inwardly, they were always looking for the opportunity to push Peter aside and take over. Once they even employed their mother to request the places at Jesus' right and left hand in his kingdom (Mt 20:20). Jesus deeply understood them and taught them the way of true greatness by learning Jesus' servant's heart and his divine love. Later, James became the first martyr (Ac 12:2). John wrote the gospel of God's love.

Philip was a brilliant person. However, it took some time for him to realize that learning Jesus' heart was more important than his genius intellect. But when he did so, he became a great shepherd. Bartholomew is a mystery among the Twelve. It seems that he did not open his mouth the entire time Jesus was on earth, except at dinner time. Though Bible scholars have searched far and wide to know something about him, they do not know anything for sure. Here we see that Jesus chooses silent men, too, as his disciples. And Jesus waits with great patience for them to open their mouths and preach the gospel.

Matthew had been Levi the tax collector. He was a selfish and destructive person who seemed most unlikely to be Jesus' apostle. But Jesus saw him with hope. When Jesus called him, Matthew left everything to follow Jesus. In the end, he might have been the person most changed by the love of Jesus. Later he wrote Matthew's Gospel, including the Sermon on the Mount, which expresses the heart of Jesus and the universal love of God the best. Jesus can change the most wretched man into the most beautiful spiritual leader.

Thomas was from Missouri, the "show-me" state. He would not believe anything unless he could see it with his eyes and touch it with his hands. After Jesus' resurrection, Thomas ignored the testimony of all the other disciples who had seen the Risen Jesus, saying he would not believe unless he could see with his eyes and touch with his hands (Jn 20:25). He seems to be a man of matchless stubbornness. But the Risen Jesus understood him and appeared again in the upper room just for Thomas. After putting his fingers in the nail pierced hand of Jesus and putting his hand into the wound in Jesus' side, Thomas confessed, "My Lord and my God." Thomas became a powerful witness of the Risen Christ. They say he went to India and preached the gospel. Now many Indian Christians are named "Thomas."

James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot and Judas son of James were chosen as Jesus' apostles. They were not so distinctive. But we can learn something about Simon the Zealot from his name. The Zealots were a political party that advocated the violent overthrow of Roman rule. We can see their descendants on the nightly news reports from Israel these days. Jesus called Simon the Zealot to be his disciple too. We imagine that Simon the Zealot became the most gentle disciple of Jesus.

Finally there was Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. Jesus loved Judas Iscariot to the end. Jesus trusted him enough to make him the treasurer of the apostolic band. But Judas never gave his heart to Jesus. Judas loved money and he wanted to save himself. In the end, he betrayed all the love of Jesus and handed him over to the religious leaders. Soon after, Judas committed suicide tragically (Mt 27:5). Judas Iscariot serves as an eternal warning to those who do not give their hearts to Jesus, though they have received Jesus' sacrificial love.

Jesus' choosing the twelve apostles reveals the universal love of God. God wants all men to be saved and does not show human favoritism. Jesus' choosing the twelve apostles also reveals the wisdom of God in world salvation work. He chose apostles among every kind of person to raise shepherds for every kind of person. This is very

important in God's work. For example, it was impossible for Matthew to be a shepherd for Simon the Zealot. It would probably take them ten years just to make friends. But Matthew could be a shepherd for those like Matthew and Simon the Zealot for those like Simon the Zealot. Jesus chose twelve apostles to save all men on earth from their sins.

Third, Jesus begins disciple training (17-26).

After choosing the twelve and designating them apostles, Jesus went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coast of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all. Jesus' earthly messianic ministry had attracted many disciples and a large crowd of people, both Jew and Gentile, who had pressing problems and urgent needs. Jesus met their needs. But his focus was to train his newly appointed disciples.

In verses 20-23 Jesus teaches the blessed life of his disciples. 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 left everything and given up their full-time jobs to follow Jesus. But Jesus did not promise them any pay, not even lunch money. Instead, he called them "blessed" in their time of poverty. It was because they learned from Jesus a "manger" lifestyle. They lived poorly, not because they could not get proper jobs, but because they followed Jesus as their first priority. From the beginning, their motive must be purely to learn from Jesus. From the beginning, they must depend on God for material things. But they are indeed blessed, for theirs is 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 have to endure times of hunger. Their lifestyle was not like that of worldly people who work hard to eat three meals a day. Jesus' disciples lived for their mission. Sometimes they had to miss meals. But they would learn to eat the Bread of Life that satisfies both body and soul. And finally they would enjoy the great banquet in the kingdom of God forever. Jesus' disciples would weep. Sometimes it was because they missed their moms. Sometimes it was because they struggled so hard to bear with one another. Mostly it was because of their own sins. But all their sorrows would turn to joy and they would laugh with loud voices 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." Jesus was hated and rejected through the instruments of the devil. His disciples would share in his persecution. But in the time of persecution, they must not feel sorry for themselves. It was the time to rejoice because they glorified God and gained a great reward in heaven. Here we learn that Jesus' disciples must have a basic attitude to endure all kinds of sufferings for the glory of God and for the sake of learning Jesus. Their ultimate reward is not in this world, but in the kingdom of God.

In verses 24-26, Jesus teaches his disciples about woes. Look at these verses. "But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for that is how their fathers treated the false prophets." Jesus warned his disciples that a life spent in pleasure and comfort on earth, though praised by men, would lead to woe in the end.

Today we learn that God loves all people of the whole world one by one. For this reason, Jesus chose twelve disciples among ordinary men and designated them apostles to preach the gospel to the whole world. God's love is universal. Also, God's love is personal. In his wisdom he uses all kinds of people as shepherds for their own kind. May God help us to know the love of Jesus personally through obedience and repentance and to live as shepherds for our own kind of people.