

JESUS CHOSE 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.”

Dr. Juan Carlos Ortiz, a former pastor of one of the largest evangelical churches in Latin America and the author of *Disciple*, shared three things that he and his team discovered after the great numeric success of their church. First, they discovered that they were running the church like a business. They were promoting Christ as they would promote Coca-Cola. Second, they discovered that their church was not growing at all. They were just getting fat. They realized that simply increasing the number of people that attend church was not growth. Third, they discovered that their church was more like an orphanage than the family of God. Their church members didn't have spiritual fathers, and he, as a minister, was simply functioning as the director of the orphanage.¹

Some Christian leaders have a wrong idea of discipleship, thinking that discipleship is a strategy to produce many believers and make their churches bigger. Bill Hull, the author of *The Complete Book of Discipleship* points out that discipleship is not a production line.² Discipleship is a way of life following Jesus Christ faithfully as his disciples.

We have heard messages on this passage many times. Especially, verse 13 is the key verse of the UBF ministry worldwide this year. We are already experts in knowledge of discipleship. However, discipleship is not a matter of knowledge, but of practice and obedience. I pray that we can follow Jesus more faithfully through this message.

I. Jesus chose the twelve apostles (12-16)

Verse 12 says, “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God.” ‘One of those days’ refers to the spiritual background of the event that Jesus chose the twelve apostles. The immediately preceding stories of chapter 6 tell us about the escalating conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of Jewish society. In fact, the conflict had been growing from when Jesus declared the forgiveness of sins to a paralyzed man saying, “Friend, your sins are forgiven” (5:20). The Pharisees and the teachers of the law got mad thinking that Jesus spoke blasphemy against God. Later, they condemned that Jesus ate and drank with tax collectors and sinners. The tension increased even more when Jesus declared that he was the Lord of the Sabbath (6:5) and confronted the religious leaders by healing a man who had a

¹ Juan Carlos Ortiz, “Interview: An Argentinean View of the Church,” *Evangelical Friend* (Sep, 1981) (Vol. 15, No.1), George Fox University, https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1151&context=nwym_evangelical_friend.

² Bill Hull, *The Complete Book of Discipleship* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2006), 36-37.

shriveled right hand on a Sabbath day. The Pharisees and the teachers of the law got furious and began to discuss with one another what they would do to Jesus (6:11).

Jesus knew that the time of God was approaching when he had to die on the cross to save all humanity. Around one year had passed after Jesus started his public ministry of salvation. Meanwhile, his popularity was growing, and many disciples were following him because his teachings had authority and the power of God was revealed through him. However, he knew that he would leave them alone in the near future and the ministry of preaching the gospel had to continue through others. Therefore, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray and spent the night praying to God. Jesus prayed every day in a deep relationship with God. Besides, he prayed more intensely on some special occasions. Later, just before being arrested and crucified, Jesus prayed so intensely that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground (22:44). Before choosing his twelve apostles, Jesus spent all night praying to God on a mountainside. Through prayer, Jesus was empowered by the Holy Spirit and led by the wisdom of God in difficult times. Through prayer, Jesus could accomplish God's salvation plan by suffering and dying on the cross for our sins. Through prayer, Jesus chose his twelve apostles so that they could continue God's salvation work. Prayer is our main means to receive God's power and wisdom. Therefore, if you are in any difficulties and problems, please come closer to God through prayer as Jesus spent all night praying to God. Then, God will grant you his power and wisdom so that you can break through difficulties and glorify God in your life of faith and mission.

(v. 13a) When morning came, Jesus called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them (13a). 'When morning came' implies that a new stage of Jesus' ministry started. What did Jesus do then? He called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them. It seems that there were more than twelve disciples on the mountainside. Furthermore, when Jesus went down with his disciples from the mountainside, there was a large crowd of his disciples too (17). We don't know exactly how many disciples were following Jesus in those days. Some say that there were seventy-two disciples because later Jesus sent seventy-two to towns and places (10:1). Others say that there were one hundred and twenty disciples because one hundred and twenty people gathered to pray together after the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:15). Anyway, many people came to Jesus to be his disciples and quit following him for various reasons. One day, Jesus fed about five thousand men with five loaves and two fish. The next day they came to Jesus again looking for food. Jesus didn't feed them with food, but with the word of God. Then, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him (John 6:66). Those followers were not committed to Jesus, nor ready to abandon everything to follow him. They were not faithful disciples of Jesus who could continue God's mission after the death and ascension of their master.

When Jesus called his disciples, he ordered them to put priority on the kingdom of God and following him. He said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (9:23). One day, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go," and Jesus replied, "Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." When Jesus said to another man, "Follow me," he replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said to Jesus, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let

me go back and say goodbye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.” (9:57-62) Some disciples accepted Jesus’ calling wholeheartedly and followed him courageously leaving everything behind (5:11, 28). On the other hand, others couldn’t obey the way of discipleship that Jesus required and gave up following him. One day, a young rich ruler asked Jesus, “Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus replied, “Sell everything you have and give to the poor. Then come, follow me.” When the young ruler heard this, he went away very sad, because he was very wealthy (18:18-30).

A German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer left a remarkable saying in his book titled *The Cost of Discipleship*: “When Jesus calls a man, he bids him come and die.”³ To be a disciple of Jesus means to follow Jesus to the point of giving one’s life for the kingdom of God. It is a very strong statement and could be a stumbling block to those who want to be disciples of Jesus. Some may say, “I will not be a disciple, but a Christian.” But it is not possible to be a Christian without being a disciple because a Christian means an adherent of Christ; one committed to Christ; and a follower of Christ. Every single Christian must be a disciple of Jesus, which means that all Christians must be ready to die for Christ and his gospel. This may cause a great dilemma to some Christians who received the grace of Jesus but are not ready yet to follow Jesus as his disciples. However, those who deeply experienced the grace of Jesus cannot reject Jesus’ calling to follow him. Bonhoeffer says that “the grace we received from God is costly because it cost God the life of his Son and what has cost God much cannot be cheap for us.”⁴ He points out that grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ is cheap grace. The grace of Jesus is costly because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. When we experience and understand the costly grace of Jesus who died on the cross for our sins, we can obey Jesus’ calling leaving everything behind and follow him to the point of giving our lives for the kingdom of God.

Throughout Christian history, numerous people experienced the costly grace of Jesus and followed him leaving everything. Mother Barry is a living example. She was born to an affluent family as the first and only daughter. She could live a comfortable life enjoying the American dream that many people aspire to achieve. However, she abandoned her privilege and human dreams and went to South Korea in 1955, one of the poorest countries in the world at that time, to share the love of Jesus with suffering Koreans, especial young college students. What caused her to make such a brave decision? It was the costly grace of Jesus who forgave her sins through his precious blood. Many UBF missionaries and shepherds are following Jesus as his disciples. Missionaries John and Maria Peace left everything and went to Ukraine to help Ukrainian college students with the gospel of Jesus because of the costly grace they received from Jesus. They suffered a lot to establish a college ministry in Podil, Ukraine as self-supporting missionaries. But two months and three weeks ago, Russia invaded Ukraine, and they had to leave the country. They went to Hungary and could be safe there; however, they returned to Ukraine in the middle

³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (NY: Touchstone, 1995), 89.

⁴ *Ibid*, 45.

of the war to take care of God's flock. What made them risk their lives? It was the costly grace of Jesus who loved them to the point of death. There are many beautiful and heart-moving stories of following Jesus among us. I am the least of those faithful missionaries and shepherds. Some weeks ago, my wife and I had lunch fellowship with missionaries Luke and Rebecca Lim from Uganda. Hearing their struggles to serve God's mission in an African country, I felt very ashamed of my easygoing life in America. I realized that I became a disciple who forgot the costly grace of Jesus for enjoying a comfortable life in America.

Jesus realized that it was the time to choose a small number of disciples and set them apart from the others so that they could be his faithful disciples and successors of his ministry in the future. (v. 13b) Thus, Jesus chose twelve of his disciples and designated them apostles (13b). Mark 3:13 says that Jesus called to him those he wanted. Jesus already had some disciples to choose in his mind and received confirmation from God through prayer. Furthermore, Jesus designated the twelve apostles. The word 'apostle' stems from a Greek word 'apostello' that means 'to send out.' The noun form, apostolos, in English apostle, means 'one who is sent.' In the four Gospel books, only the twelve disciples chosen by Jesus were recognized as apostles. Even though Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples ahead of him to towns and places to preach the gospel, heal the sick, and drive out demons (10:1-17), they were not called apostles. In the early church, the title apostle was expanded more to some church leaders and those who had special mission such as Paul (Gal 1:1), Barnabas (Ac 14:14), and James the brother of Jesus (Gal 1:19).

The purpose of Jesus to choose the twelve apostles was very clear. Mark 3:14, 15 say, "He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons."

First, the apostles were chosen to be with Jesus. It was a great privilege for them to be with Jesus 24/7. They could see Jesus closely meditating on the word of God, praying to God, preaching the gospel, healing the sick, driving out demons, having fellowship with others, eating, fasting, sleeping, going to the restroom, laughing, crying, etc. Most of all, they could learn the character of Jesus such as love, grace, truth, faith, compassion, mercy, patience, holiness, justice, peace, self-control, etc. They were so amazed by the perfection of Jesus and tried to imitate him denying their sinful characters. Also, Jesus helped them personally to have shepherd hearts and faith in God. They could grow spiritually under the care of the good shepherd. Don't you like to be with Jesus always learning from him?

Second, the apostles were chosen to be sent out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons. The apostles are ambassadors and delegates of Jesus and the kingdom of heaven. They received the authority of Jesus and spoke and acted with the power of God. They preached the gospel of the kingdom of God, healed the sick, and drove out demons with the authority of Jesus. When Jesus ascended to heaven, they took over the ministry of Jesus and continued to preach the gospel of salvation to the world. Throughout last 2,000 years, the ministry of Jesus has been succeeded by the apostles and disciples of Jesus. The gospel message has been preached so powerfully and fruitfully that the kingdom of God expanded all over the world. Now, Jesus wants to send us to the world, and he gives us the great commission saying, "All authority

in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Mt 28:18-20). God’s salvation work will continue until the second coming of Jesus through his disciples who obey the great commission and go and make disciples of all nations. Do you want to participate in the salvation history of our Lord Jesus Christ?

The twelve apostles’ names are recorded as follows: 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 (14-16). The number twelve represents the twelve tribes of Israel, and the whole world. By choosing the twelve disciples, Jesus established a new Israel who could serve the whole world with his gospel. The twelve disciples were ordinary people. They were not trained at a seminary school or well educated, while the Pharisees and the teachers of the law held doctoral degrees. They were not ordained priests, but simply fishermen, a tax-collector, a member of a political party, and others. However, they had encountered Jesus as their Messiah (Jn 1:41, 49; Lk 5:8, 28). They had humble and obedient minds to learn from Jesus. When they were called, they left everything to follow Jesus. They were ready to die for Christ and the kingdom of God. Hence, Jesus had hope for each of them. Especially, Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter, which means ‘rock,’ with the hope of building his church on Peter’s confession of faith (Mt 16:18). They made a lot of mistakes. Judas Iscariot sold his master and hanged himself. Peter disowned Jesus three times when his master was going through the most difficult time. However, the hope of Jesus changed them to become great servants of God. Really, it is a great blessing and privilege to be a disciple of Jesus. Do you want to be a faithful disciple of Jesus?

II. Blessings and woes (17-26)

After choosing the twelve apostles, Jesus went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples and a great number of people were waiting for him to hear the word of God and to be healed of their diseases. Jesus healed them with the power of God. And looking at his disciples he gave a beautiful sermon called the sermon on a level place or “The Sermon on the Plain.”

In this passage, four blessings and four woes are recorded in a symmetric way. First, blessed are you who are poor, but woe to you who are rich (20, 24). Second, blessed are you who hunger now, but woe to you who are well fed now (21a, 25a). Third, blessed are you who weep now, but woe to you who laugh now (21b, 25b). Fourth, blessed are you when people hate you, but woe to you when everyone speaks well of you (22, 26). We are blessed when we are poor in spirit, when we hunger for righteousness, when we weep for our sins, and when we are hated because of the name of Jesus. Those who are poor in spirit will try to fill themselves with the spirit of God and will receive the kingdom of God. Those who hunger for righteousness will be filled with the righteousness of Jesus. Those who weep for their sins will be comforted by the

forgiveness of Jesus. Those who are hated because of the name of Jesus will be rewarded in heaven.

However, we don't want to be poor, but rich in possession. We don't want to be hungry, but well fed. We don't want to weep, but laugh. We don't want to be hated, but respected. To be poor, to hunger, to weep, and to be hated are totally opposite to the value system of our society. The values of the American Dream are self-advancement, self-esteem, and self-sufficiency by individualism, materialism, and universalism.⁵ The American Dream culture tells us that we should be rich, we should be well fed, we should laugh, and we should be respected to live a happy life in this country. The problem is that the American churches have embraced the values and ideas of the American Dream that are unbiblical and contradict the gospel of Jesus.⁶ Therefore, to preach this sermon of Jesus seems to be obsolete and offensive to those who are convinced by this culture. However, what is true discipleship? It is to live as the faithful disciples of Jesus obeying the word of God.

Jesus calls us to be his disciples. Jesus calls us to come and die. Jesus calls us to preach the gospel and make disciples of all nations. Jesus calls us to be poor, to hunger, to weep, and to be hated for his name. I pray that God may help each of us to accept the calling of Jesus and follow him faithfully as his disciples.

⁵ David Platt, *Radical: Taking Back Your Faith from the American Dream* (NY: Multnomah, 2010), 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.