

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...”

Jesus was becoming popular. News of his preaching and healing ministry was spreading far and wide. At the same time, opposition against Jesus was growing stronger, especially from the religious leaders. Jesus challenged their legalistic rule-keeping way of thinking and living. They had no care or compassion for suffering people. In contrast, Jesus was healing lepers and paralytics and a man with a shriveled hand, even if it was the Sabbath. Jesus did not mind violating the Sabbath traditions if he could show the mercy and power of God to do good and to save life.

What could Jesus do in that situation? Should he send fire from heaven to destroy his enemies in their homes? Should he move to another nation? Should he quit his ministry and get an easier job? No, no, no. Jesus went to a mountain and prayed all night. Then he chose 12 apostles. Why these men? I will propose 4 reasons. Next Jesus preached the new way of his kingdom, in what is called the Sermon on the Plain. We will hear the first part of Jesus’ sermon.

I. Twelve Apostles Chosen (12-16)

Look at verse 12. **“One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.”** Jesus spent serious time in prayer. Especially when he had a critical decision to make or direction to take, he spent more time in prayer.

Prayer is coming humbly to God, seeking his will. We all need strength, wisdom and guidance from God in our lives every day, some days more than others. But do we seek God? Some seek guidance in ridiculous ways, like horoscopes or in other-spirit ways, like palm readers or Dr. Phil or Oprah. Do we seek strength from working out or from a motivational speaker? Do we seek wisdom from self-help books? In ancient times, unfaithful people would seek help from idols or from false prophets, like Balaam. Can we say like the psalmist in Psalm 121, **“My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth”**? How earnestly or how often are we seeking our Lord’s will in prayer?

Are you facing a difficult decision or situation in your life right now that burdens or worries you? Listen to Philippians 4:6, **“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving,**

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present your requests to God.” Do you need wisdom from above? James 1:5 says, **“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”**

After spending all night in prayer, what did Jesus do? He did not hide, or quit, or move away. Look at verse 13. **“When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles...”**

There were many people who were following Jesus part time. A few had even left their careers to follow Jesus at Jesus’ invitation. They were students of Jesus, learning from his teaching. They were also apprentices of Jesus, imitating his lifestyle. Among the many disciples, Jesus hand-selected 12 men. He singled them out. Maybe he put his hand on each shoulder as he walked through the crowd saying, “I chose you.” I’m not sure if they were happy or trembling that Jesus chose them. Maybe they were both happy and nervous, wondering why Jesus chose them. Was it for a special mission? Was he going to fire them and send them home?

Jesus designated them **“apostles.”** Apostle means **“sent one”** or **“messenger.”** Mark 3:14-15 is clearer on why Jesus chose them. It says, **“...that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.”** Jesus called them to spend more time with him, full time with him. Of course, they each regarded it as a great privilege, because none of them refused. To be with Jesus meant to hear his teachings, to observe him in action how he dealt with life situations. It meant to learn Jesus’ thinking and feeling, his mind and heart.

Jesus’ intention was that later he would send them out to preach and to defeat the devil’s work in people. This was Jesus’ wisdom. This was Jesus’ strategy and plan to help save, and change and heal the world.

Who were the 12 apostles? Their names are given in 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.”**

Luke has already introduced us to 4 of these twelve: 3 of them were fishermen - Simon Peter, James and John, and 1 was a tax collector, Matthew, also known as Levi. We know that Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was also a fisherman. So two sets of brothers among the 12 were fishermen. Only one more occupation is mentioned: Simon the Zealot. He was a political revolutionary and a

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candidate to be involved in an assassination plot against Rome. Judas Iscariot, who would later betray Jesus, is also mentioned. The best information in the Bible on the rest of these apostles comes from John's gospel. Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the seaport town of Bethsaida (Jn 1:44). He seems to have studied mathematics or economics (Jn 6:7) and he once asked Jesus, **"Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us"** (Jn 14:8). Jesus said of Bartholomew, also known as Nathanael: **"Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit"** (Jn 1:47). Thomas is famous for doubting that Jesus actually rose from the dead, even though the other disciples told him that they saw Risen Jesus. He said, **"Unless I see and touch his wounds myself, I will not believe."** So he became known in history as "doubting Thomas." Once, in a brave moment, Thomas said to the other disciples, **"Let us also go [with Jesus back to Jerusalem], that we may die with him"** (Jn 11:16). Judas son of James once said to Jesus, **"But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"** (Jn 14:22)

These references tell us mostly about the mindset and character of the apostles. Then why did Jesus choose 12 men, and why these 12? I propose four reasons:

(1) Jesus was making a new Israel. Israel had 12 tribes from the 12 sons of Jacob. These 12 tribes formed the nation of Israel. But Israel's established structure and leaders did not accept his message and reign. Jesus was forming a new nation, a new society based on his teachings and his work. It was to be a new city, a new temple, built on the foundation of the apostles, with Jesus as the Chief Cornerstone. Regarding the inclusion of non-Jews as God's people, Ephesians 2:19-21 says: **"Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord."** Again, Revelation 21:14 describes the Holy City: **"The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."**

(2) Jesus can change any kind of person. Jesus chose twelve very different men. They were all radically changed to become new history-makers and world-changers. If Jesus could change them, he can change you and me.

(3) Jesus brings all kinds of people together. As mentioned, Simon was an anti-Roman revolutionary. On the other hand, Matthew the tax collector collected taxes for the Roman Empire. We can imagine that Simon the Zealot, in his natural feeling, wanted to kill Matthew. And Matthew, wanted to throw Simon the Zealot in prison. But in Jesus, they became brothers. In Jesus, enemies can become

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friends. In Jesus, we become one family. There are many beautiful stories and examples of how hatred was changed to love through Jesus Christ.

Corrie ten Boom was imprisoned for hiding Jews in her home in the time of Nazi Germany. She wanted to kill her prison guard who was so cruel to her. Later, after the war, Corrie was talking at a Christian meeting in Germany and said that the Lord casts our sins in the depth of the sea. She saw her former prison guard there. The guard came to her saying that he had become a Christian. He appreciated her sermon and held out his hand to ask for her forgiveness. For a moment, Corrie froze, remembering the prison and her sister's death there. She recalls: "Jesus, help me!" I prayed silently. "I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling." And so woodenly, mechanically, I thrust my hand into the one stretched out to me. And as I did, an incredible thing took place. The current started in my shoulder, raced down my arm, sprang into our joined hands. And then this healing warmth seemed to flood my whole being, bringing tears to my eyes. "I forgive you, brother!" I cried. "With all my heart!" For a long moment we grasped each other's hands, the former guard and the former prisoner. I had never known God's love so intensely as I did then.¹ By his blood, Jesus will purchase for God people from every tribe, language, people and nation (Rev 5:9).

(4) Jesus wants to reach all people. Although some great evangelists like Jesus and like Paul can reach and minister to all kinds of people, most of us connect better with certain people. For example, I grew up Catholic and I like running. Strangely, though I randomly invite people to Bible study, over the years it seems that the most faithful Bible students I have had have been Catholic and were glad to go running together. What kind of person are you? It might be in your character or upbringing or social or ethnic background, or a hobby or interest. God can use you to reach people like yourself. Maybe you've gone through a painful ordeal with the help of God, and God wants to use you to minister to others who are in a similar trial.

One young man had a failed marriage. So when he saw evidence that a married man's marriage was not what it should be, he exhorted the married man to make progress in his marriage, before it was too late. God has used many wounded people to bring healing to other wounded people when they turned their misery into ministry for God's glory.

¹ <https://www.guideposts.org/inspiration/stories-of-hope/guideposts-classics-corrie-ten-boom-on-forgiveness?nopaging=1>, accessed 11/7/15.

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II. Blessings & Woes: Jesus' Sermon on the Plain—Part 1 of 3 (17-26)

What happened after Jesus chose the twelve apostles? Look at verses 17-19: **“He 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 coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by impure spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.”** People came to hear Jesus and to be healed of diseases and cured of impure spirits. Jesus' disciples and apostles would need to learn from Jesus how to minister to these people with God's word and prayer and God's power.

Jesus had so much to teach his disciples. So he stood on a level place and gave them a sermon in verses 17-49. This sermon is called The Sermon on the Plain. It is similar to the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5-7. Both begin with “blessed” ones and both end with the parable of the wise and foolish builder. Jesus' sermon in Luke is shorter, because Luke spreads Jesus' teachings throughout his gospel.

Look at verse 20a. **“Looking at his disciples, he said...”** There were both disciples and crowds surrounding Jesus. But Jesus directed this first part to his disciples, about who are blessed people and who are people for whom woes are reserved.

First, blessed people. They are described in verses 20-22: **“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.”**

At first glance, it sounds like Jesus is saying blessed people are poor, hungry and weep a lot. But that would contradict both the Bible and common observation. For example, the Book of Proverbs gives various reasons for poverty, such as oversleeping (6:11), laziness (10:4), mere talk (14:23), haste (21:5), misuse of money (22:16), chasing fantasies (28:19), and stinginess (28:22). None of these causes are righteous.

So why are the poor, the hungry, and those who weep blessed? The key is verse 22: **“Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man.”** The key phrase is **“because of the Son of Man.”** That is, because of Jesus.

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Jesus was looking at his disciples. Simon Peter and Matthew the tax collector had already left their jobs to follow Jesus. They were struggling to survive. They spent even their life savings to follow Jesus. Jesus says, **“yours is the kingdom of God.”** They were hungry enough to eat in the grainfields on the Sabbath day. But Jesus promised, **“you will be satisfied.”** Women would weep for Jesus at his cross and tomb. But they would laugh, during his resurrection. Jesus’ disciples were already being hated, excluded, insulted and rejected as evil because of Jesus. They were foolish in the eyes of the world. But they were wise and blessed in the eyes of Jesus.

Look at verse 23. **“Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.”** Jesus likens his followers to the true prophets of God. Why? Because they believed and proclaimed God’s message as God’s messengers. Jesus’ apostles were the prophets, appointed by Jesus, to succeed his message and ministry. Disciples of Jesus accept his message and proclaim it to others. So they are of a kindred spirit with God’s prophets who received and proclaimed the word of God to their people.

Are you hated, excluded, insulted or rejected as evil by anyone because of Jesus Christ? Are you sacrificing money, pleasures and comforts in this world for Jesus Christ?

Before you answer, let’s look at the people destined for woes according to Jesus in verses 24-26: **“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 everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.”**

Again at first glance, it seems that anyone who has money in the bank, food in the pantry, laughter in their home, and are spoken well of are in for trouble. Does this mean then that Jesus’ disciples can no longer enjoy a square meal, and they must not laugh at all? Surely not.

Verse 26 holds the key: **“for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.”** There are true prophets and there are false prophets. True prophets follow God’s word. False prophets follow their own worldly desires and ideas. Their hope and investment is in this world. Their lives are aimed at rich living, gourmet food, entertainment, popularity, and human honor and recognition. They do not live “because of Jesus” but for themselves. They are self-centered. They love the world. They cannot follow Jesus. They cannot be Jesus’ disciples.

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Apostle John echoes this same teaching in 1 John 2:15-17: **“Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.”**

So the question is: Are you following Jesus or are you following the world? Are you loving Jesus or are you loving the world? Are you investing your time, your money, your heart, your effort, your life in Jesus or in the pleasures and treasures of this world? Do you do what you do, say what you say and think what you think **“because of the Son of Man”**? If so, you are blessed and great is your reward in heaven.

On the other hand, if you are living for the comforts and glories of this world, wake up, and change your direction, because Jesus says woes are ahead. We Americans are blessed materially. The comforts and pleasures at our fingertips are but dreams for many in the world. While Americans are wondering what age they should get a cell phone for their child, many people in poor nations struggle to eat 1 meal a day. The median family income in the USA is about \$50,000². In Haiti it is less than \$500 or 1% of the American home. I have a friend who got a seminary degree in Chicago. Afterwards he went back to his home country, Haiti, to pastor his father’s church. He chose to be poor because of Jesus. His is the kingdom of God and great is his reward in heaven.

Jesus called twelve apostles who would continue the message and ministry of his kingdom. Because of him they were living. Because of him they were blessed. May God bless you and me to follow Jesus and live because of him.

² <http://www.deptofnumbers.com/income/us/>, accessed 11/7/15.