

Luke 6:12-19

Calling the Twelve

We live in an age of choice. We choose our President and other political leaders. We also choose whether or not we will kill the child we have conceived. And we want to choose whether we will marry someone from the same gender as ourselves. Choice is a mantra of the 21st century. Choice implies sovereignty, control. We believe we are in control, so we want to choose.

God has always chosen. And He has always chosen well, though His choices did not always make sense from the human standpoint. For example, God chose Abraham though he was an idolater and offered his wife to another man to save himself from possible harm. God chose Isaac, though he did the same thing. God chose Jacob, though he was deceitful and manipulative. God chose Moses, though he had murdered a man in a fit of rage. God chose Aaron, though he led Israel into idolatry. God chose Rahab, though she was a prostitute. God chose David, though he was an adulterer who arranged the murder of the man whose wife he had taken. God chose Elijah, though he was fearful. God chose Jonah, though he was stubborn and unforgiving. God chose Paul, though he was a Pharisee. And God chose each of us. Despite the wickedness of our hearts and the continual disobedience we offer in return, God chose each of us.

God's criteria for choosing is different from that of the world. He has "chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong" 1 Corinthians 1:27.

When Jesus chose His disciples, he did not choose from among the religious leaders. None were priests, Pharisees, rabbis, Levites, etc. None, with the exception of Matthew, were financially well off. None were highly educated, even by the standards of the day. Those Jesus chose included fishermen, a tax collector (who was in the employ of the Roman government), and a political radical (who sought to overthrow that government). Yet Jesus chose these men and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, these men would change the world.

Preparation

Luke gives us no more details than to say that "at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray" (v.12). He does not say which mountain, and he does not say precisely when. The word Luke uses does not refer to calendar time, but instead to a moment or period of time. The period being referred to is the escalation of tension between the Pharisees and Jesus. Jesus knew well the events that would take place in the future, and He knew that He had to leave behind a group prepared to build on (with the help of the Holy Spirit) the foundation He had laid.

Jesus "spent the whole night in prayer to God" (v.12). This is the only time this particular word is used in the New Testament and it means just what it says. Jesus prayed throughout the entire night. Important decisions ought not to be made rashly on in the flesh. An example for us all.

Selection

In the morning, Jesus “called His disciples to Him” (v. 13). The word used for ‘disciples’ means student or follower - a very common characteristic of a rabbi. In both the Greek culture of the Roman world, and the Jewish culture of Palestine, teachers had students who followed them, listened as they taught, asked questions, and generally copied the thinking and lifestyle of their mentors.

Jesus certainly attracted followers. He had healed the sick, cast out demons, and won debates against His rivals. Word about Him had spread even as far as Jerusalem, and many had come to see if what they had heard was true. His reputation preceded Him wherever He went in Galilee. That eventually Jesus would speak to crowds of thousands indicates His popularity (Luke 12:1).

Not that everyone who came out to see Jesus joined Him. Even many who began to follow eventually turned away. Though they saw and experienced the miracles “many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore” (John 6:66). The cost of discipleship was high. Jesus taught that one had to give up his life to save it, and that if you loved your family more than Him you were not worthy to be His disciple. Also, the Pharisees were always about, looking for opportunities to accuse.

Jesus “chose twelve of them” (v. 13). The number twelve is not random; it reflects the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus emphasized this point later when He said to these twelve, “²⁹just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you ³⁰that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” Luke 22:29-30. His disciples remembered at least this much of His teaching, for after the defection of Judas, they chose Matthias to replace him to keep the number at twelve (Acts 1:23-26).

In addition to the list in Luke, there are three other times the names of the apostles are mentioned in Scripture (Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, and Acts 1:13 are the others). With the exception of Acts, which is in a different context, the lists have the same names always arranged in three groups of four. The groups are always the same, though the names within them may be in a different order, and the first name of each in the group is always the same. I have standardized the names in the lists below.

<u>Matthew</u>	<u>Mark</u>	<u>Luke</u>
Peter, Andrew, James, John	Peter, James, John, Andrew	Peter, Andrew, James, John
Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew	Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas	Philip, Bartholomew,
Matthew Thomas		
James, Thaddaeus, Simon, Judas	James, Thaddaeus, Simon, Judas	James, Simon, Thaddaeus, Judas

Purpose

The purpose of choosing twelve men from among the others was clear. Jesus chose them because they were to be “named as apostles” (v. 13). The word means messenger or ambassador. It implies a person given the full authority of the person who sent him. This was a commonly used designation at the time and had a long history in ancient Near Eastern and Greco-Roman cultures. Even King David had used *shaliach*, the Hebrew equivalent of apostles, in proposing marriage to Abigail, “⁴⁰When the servants of David came to Abigail at Carmel, they spoke to her, saying, ‘David has sent us to you to take you as his wife.’ ⁴¹She arose and bowed with her face to the ground and said, ‘Behold, your maidservant is a maid to wash the feet of my lord’s servants.’ ⁴²Then Abigail quickly arose, and rode on a donkey, with her five

maidens who attended her; and she followed the messengers of David and became his wife” (1 Samuel 25:40-42).

The New Testament uses the term to denote many sent out in the cause of Christ. A broad definition of the term would include people such as Barnabas, Epaphroditus, Silvanus, and Timothy. A more narrow sense refers to those specifically trained by Jesus to be the foundation of His church. It is in that sense that the word is used here.

Apostleship is an office, and the role of an apostle was one Jesus would emphasize again, “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives whomever I send receives Me; and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me.” (John 13:20). However, we ought to understand that this moment of choosing was not so much for sending out, as for training up. To be sure eventually these, and others, would be sent out, but first they needed to be nurtured in their new faith. This was only one step in a process.

Significance

The apostles, as a group, are significant for at least three reasons. First, they are the foundation on which Christ built His Church. As a result we can be “¹⁹fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, ²⁰having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19-20).

Second, they were permitted to receive the divine revelation that became the New Testament. This revelation “was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit” Ephesians 3:5. When we include Paul as an apostle, which he was since He was specifically chosen by Christ, we see that almost the entire New Testament was written either by an apostle himself or under their influence:

- Matthew - apostle
- Mark - companion of Peter
- Luke - companion of Paul
- John - apostle
- Acts - written by Luke
- Romans-Philemon - Paul
- Hebrews - unknown
- James - half-brother of Jesus
- 1 & 2 Peter - apostle
- 1-3 John - apostle
- Jude - half-brother of Jesus
- Revelation - John

Third, these apostles were given specific power to perform miracles to validate their message. “The signs of a true apostle were performed among you with all perseverance, by signs and wonders and miracles ” (2 Corinthians 12:12). This was the intention of God, “God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (Hebrews 2:4).

The Men Themselves

To the human eye, this was not a promising lot. Even during their time with Jesus, they seemed foolish, stubborn, and generally unable to grasp the significance of what was going on.

They lacked understanding, Matthew 15:15-16, “¹⁵Peter said to Him, ‘Explain the parable to us.’
¹⁶Jesus said, ‘Are you still lacking in understanding also?’”

They displayed hardness of heart, Mark 8:17, “And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, ‘Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart?’”

They lacked humility, Mark 9:33-34, “³³They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He began to question them, ‘What were you discussing on the way?’ ³⁴But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which of them was the greatest.”

They were manipulative Matthew 20:20-21, “²⁰Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. ²¹And He said to her, ‘What do you wish?’ She said to Him, ‘Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left.’”

Their faith was weak, Matthew 8:24-25, “²⁴And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea, so that the boat was being covered with the waves; but Jesus Himself was asleep. ²⁵And they came to Him and woke Him, saying, ‘Save us, Lord; we are perishing!’”

They deserted Him in His greatest time of need, Mark 14:50, “And they all left Him and fled.”

Initiation

After choosing the twelve, Jesus “came down with them and stood on a level place,” where there was “a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon” (v. 17). As before, these people had traveled many miles “to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured” (v. 18).

There were three groups of people present. The recently chosen disciples stood with Jesus (Jesus was standing rather than sitting, as would be usual for a teacher, because He would be actively engaged in interacting with the people). The second group were His “large crowd of disciples” (v. 17). These followers were at different levels of involvement with Jesus. Some would, over time and by God’s grace, continue to grow in their understanding of Who He was and follow Him. Others would lose interest, become fearful, or simply not believe, and cease following. The third group was the “great throng of people” who had come to hear Jesus (v. 17).

The crowds were growing and becoming more diverse. Not only Galileans and people from “all Judea and Jerusalem,” but now people from “Tyre and Sidon” are mentioned (v. 17). These cities were northwest of Galilee on the Mediterranean Sea and were in the larger area of Phoenicia.

They had come to listen, and they would not go home disappointed. The account recorded in Luke 6:20-49 of what Jesus says is very similar to the Sermon on the Mount recorded in Matthew 5-7. Is this the same speech? Probably. There are differences, but those could merely reflect the interest or purpose of the writer. That Luke says this sermon was preached “on a level place” (v. 17) and Matthew 5:1 says Jesus “went up on a mountain” is not a problem, since mountains have level places where people can

stand and crowds can gather. Whether it was the same sermon, or simply a recounting of themes that Jesus preached as He traveled, the words are the very words of God.

They had come to be healed. Luke distinguishes between those who were “healed of their diseases” and those “troubled with unclean spirits” (v. 18). A larger point is that this was no cattle call, but rather individuals meeting with the Lord Jesus to have their specific, personal needs met. This was the first lesson for these disciples.

This briefly mentioned event demonstrated in microcosm, the person and work of Jesus Christ. Jesus was a teacher. He taught the gospel of salvation and preached the kingdom of God. He was supported in this by performing miracles. These miracles verified that He was the Son of God and that what He said was true. Jesus showed power over the physical body with healing, and the spiritual world by exorcising demons. His comprehensive power ministered to the mind, body and soul. The disciples training began here.

Take Aways

Note that Jesus chose Judas. This informs us of two things at least. First, the fact of being chosen for leadership in a church body does not in itself confer grace. Second, we should never make idols of our spiritual leaders. They are sinful, fallen men just like us.

Also remember that God’s kingdom is not built because of the help of this world. The apostles had neither money nor power to compel attention, let alone obedience, to their message. That a handful of men, with a doctrine most unsatisfactory to our human sense, should overspread the world can only be explained by the power of God. We need to guard ourselves against looking to money, or influence, or education, or any other worldly thing for success in the church.

Finally, Jesus could have performed any miracle to demonstrate His power. He chose to do miracles that provided healing and restoration. What an example of compassion.