Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Twelve Ordinary Men
Scripture: Mark 3:13-19
Code: 41-14

It's wonderful to be back in the gospel of Mark and I want you to open your Bible to Mark chapter 3 this morning as we look at the gospel of Mark. We are going to be looking at a very simple section of the gospel of Mark that essentially has to do with identifying the Apostles...identifying the Apostles. It's not a complex passage, not a doctrinal passage and yet I think it's one of the most encouraging passages in Scripture. It was many, many years ago, of course, that I preached in Matthew and we came to the listing of the Apostles in Matthew chapter 10 and some of you will remember, we spent about three months going through the Apostles, every one of them, all we know about them from Scripture and all about their history and all that. And then not too many years ago we went through the gospel of Luke and when we came to the Apostles' listing in Luke chapter 6, we essentially did the same thing again. I took the time for months to go through every life, every Apostle, all the details. Out of those two series came a book called *Twelve Ordinary Men. Twelve Ordinary Men*has been a well-received book and encouraging to see how the story of how the Lord uses very, very ordinary people.

But in the consistency with the plan that I have in the gospel of Mark, we're going to have one message, and that's this morning, on these twelve men. As you know, Mark is kind of the newspaper approach to the story of Jesus, want to keep it condensed, keep it fast paced as Mark intended for us to do. And so, we're just going to look at this in a broad and a general sense. And I say that in order to encourage you that if you want a little more detail on these men, plenty can be found in the Matthew series, the Luke series and the book *Twelve Ordinary Men.*

Now when we think about the twelve Apostles, typically if you have any kind of background in the church or any kind of background maybe in a Catholic Church or an Anglican Church or you've been to Europe and you've seen a cathedral, you've seen the stained-glass Apostles. They're typically elevated in a transcendent way, somewhere just below God or just below Christ or in some very prominent place because the assumption is that these are the highest and the best and the classiest and the most religiously ascended of all Christian masters.

Nothing could be further from the truth. They are not other worldly, they are not nearly divine, they are not the cream of the crop among men. They're not the highest and the noblest and the best. They're not the most educated, the most highly skilled, the most gifted, humanly speaking. The truth is, they basically are distinguished by one thing, that is they are ordinary. They have that in common. And they are...they are a motley, motley group. They are a very, very strange group. You couldn't pull

them together any other way than God doing it for His own purposes because of their divergence. While as many as seven of them might have been fishermen, you might have gotten seven guys together on that common ground. The others are so different in the things that they did and we know for sure only four are fishermen that there would be no reason to collect these men together, no reason for them to come together, live together, work together and minister together apart from the purposes of God. They are perfectly ordinary men in every way. Not one of them is renowned for scholarship. Not one of them is renowned for erudition. None of them had a track record as an orator or some kind of theologian. They were outsiders, total outsiders from the religious establishment of Jesus' day. They didn't have any particular natural talents. They don't appear to have any particular intellectual talents. They weren't highly educated. They were, on the other hand, prone to mistakes and misjudgments and misunderstandings and bad attitudes and lapses of faith and bitter failure and argumentativeness and no more so than their leader, Peter. And Jesus remarked that they were slow learners, they were spiritually dense. They were blockheads.

And then you think about the fact that they span the political spectrum. One of them was a Zealot, a radical, a political radical determined to overthrow the Romans and some of those radicals were called *sicarii*. They carried around little daggers in their cloaks and when they found a Roman soldier unsuspecting, they murdered him. Another one was a tax collector. He would have been on the opposite spectrum. You've got some who were killing the Romans. You've got some who take a tax franchise, buy it from the Romans and then collect taxes from the Jewish people to give to the oppressing occupying Romans. So those two would have absolutely nothing in common and if they had met each other somewhere along the way, one might have killed the other one.

As I said, four to seven of them were fishermen. If the three final that I include in the seven weren't fishermen, they worked in an agrarian environment. Galilee was pretty much farming country. They may have been tradesmen, craftsmen or farmers of some kind. They were virtually all from Galilee with the exception of Judas who was the only outsider and total stranger. They grew up in the same basic area, even common towns like Bethsaida and Capernaum and may well have known each other as they were growing up. And they would have known each other, not distinguished men by any means at all.

They had faults, character flaws and yet they carried on a ministry after Jesus ascended into heaven that totally turned the world upside down. And their ministry is still going on today and we are part of the impact of that ministry. We're part of that legacy and those to whom we minister and those in this generation to minister to the next generation will follow in the train that basically was set in motion on the tracks by these first twelve. They were personally selected out of the many disciples that followed Jesus. He identified who they were. They didn't volunteer for the job, He chose them for the job. He called them. He knew them only as their Creator could know them. He knew all their faults long before He chose them. He knew their weaknesses, He knew their failures, He even knew Judas would betray Him. He chose Judas anyway, gave him all the same privileges and blessings He gave

the others.

And when you think about the ramifications of this, you've got these twelve non-descript ordinary no-name kind of eclectic men brought together and from a human perspective, the whole extension of the Kingdom of God and advance of the gospel in the world depends upon them and there's no plan B. There's no second stream...second string, there's no backup squad. They're going to be responsible to receive divine revelation. They and their associates are going to write the New Testament. They're going to be the foundation of the church, Ephesians 2:20, the Apostles are the foundation of the church and it all depends on twelve men whose most notable characteristic is that they were just plain ordinary men.

Well let's look at the text and meet them. We're in Mark 3:13. “And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted and they came to Him. He appointed twelve so that they would be with Him that He could send them out to preach and have authority to cast out the demons. And He appointed the twelve, Simon to whom He gave the name Peter, and James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to them He gave the name ‘Boanerges,' which means ‘Sons of Thunder;.' and Andrew and Philip and Bartholomew, and Matthew and Thomas and James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him.”

Now just in reading those names, there's a wonderful reality that comes out of this. These names are both given names and nicknames. That sort of betrays the intimacy of this little group. Now this is not some kind of a formal listing. While there are four lists of the Apostles, Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts, Acts 1 is the fourth, there are a couple of times when the names are varied a little bit so that we know that sometimes they were called by their given name and sometimes they were called by their nickname.

There's something kind of personal and warm about that and they sort of received their nicknames, in some cases, from Jesus. It was Jesus who nicknamed Simon Peter. It was Jesus who nicknamed James and John “Boanerges.” And then some of them had picked up other nicknames. Thaddaeus isn't really a name, it is a nickname. And so there's a very simple kind of personal aspect to these lists. This is not some kind of formal list but rather a very personal one.

Now when you think about why there are twelve, you might scratch your head and say, “Is there a reason there are twelve and not thirteen, or fifteen? Even though you have later the Apostle Paul, he's not a part of the Twelve, he is an Apostle, but he's an Apostle in late time and stands alone apart from the Twelve. And when Judas fell out, you remember, in Acts 1, they picked Mathias to take Judas' place so the Twelve was constituted again. The question is, why were there twelve of them? And I'm going to answer that question and that's going to be the main thing I want to convey to you in this text in a way that you might not have expected.

When Jesus selected the Twelve Apostles, He was doing something that was parallel to some other things He did. You might think that this was kind of a stand-alone event, this was kind of a ministry strategy thing, this was kind of personally Jesus just kind of pulling some guys together, give them some help. That was way more than that. It was a statement...in fact, it was a statement of judgment. It was a statement of judgment on Israel. The parallels to Jesus selecting Twelve men as His Apostles. The parallels to that would be the opening of the ministry of Jesus in Jerusalem when He made a whip, went into the temple, attacked the temple operation, attacked the Sadducees, and the scribes and the whole power structure of Israel, threw out the money changers, threw out the buyers and sellers of animals and denounced them, pronounced judgment on them and said, “You've turned My Father's house, a house of prayer, into a den of thieves.” That was a severe judgment. That was really an anticipation of the devastating final destruction that came in 70 A.D. when the temple was smashed to the ground by the Romans.

Then at the end of His ministry, three years later, He came into Jerusalem, came in on Monday and they hailed Him as Messiah, Son of David, hosanna, all of that and within hours of that, He went back to the temple again and He did the same thing. He assaulted that corrupt prostituted religious system and He threw the people back out again, did the same thing and the religious leaders, of course. He denounced and He preached a sermon against them recorded in its fullness in Matthew 23 where He called the religious leaders of Israel snakes and vipers and men who produce sons of hell and whited sepulchers and killers of the prophets and even killers of the Son of God in a parable He told them about a man who sent His Son, you remember, and they killed the Son.

There was just one assault at the beginning of His ministry one assault at the end of His ministry, then it was escalated in the diatribe recorded in Matthew 23. His final words to the people of Jerusalem was to beware of the scribes and the Pharisees, beware of the religious leaders, avoid them, stay away from them. And He wrapped up His comments on them by saying, “They are going to receive a greater condemnation. They're headed for a hotter hell than others because they have prostituted the truth. His devastating assaults on the temple, His diatribe against the leaders of Israel recorded in Matthew 23, the destruction pronounced on the whole system, you remember, He said, “Not one stone will be left upon another,” the whole thing is coming down, this calling of the Twelve Apostles fits into the category of those kinds of judgments.

You say, “How can that be? How can they be in any way related? This seems rather benign. As I said, this seems like nothing more than a ministry strategy.” But it's far more than that.

If you go back in Mark chapter 3 to verse 6 for a moment, you'll understand the scene. We're not very far into the ministry of Jesus, into His Galilean ministry before it becomes pretty clear to all of us that the leaders hate Him and they want Him dead. And so, in chapter 3 after He has in their minds violated the Sabbath, verse 6, the Pharisees went out, immediately began conspiring with the

Herodians against Him as to how they might destroy Him. The Sadducees already want Him dead because of what He did when He tore into the operation in the temple. Now all the religious leaders are coming together and they all want Him dead.

They have come to a conclusion about Him and that conclusion is given in verse 22. Look at Mark chapter 3 verse 22, “The scribes who came down from Jerusalem,” what did they do? They said, regarding Jesus, “He is possessed by Beelzebul.” That was an ancient name for the devil. “He cast out demons by the ruler of the demons. He is satanic, He is devilish, He is demonic.”

Now in verse 28, “Jesus responded to this by saying, ‘All sins shall be forgiven the sons of men and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness but is guilty of an eternal sin.”

What did He mean by that? The Holy Spirit had attested to the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. If you say that He is satanic, then you have blasphemed the testimony of the Holy Spirit and that is unforgivable. If you make a wrong conclusion about Jesus Christ, you're damned. There's no way around that. There's no escape from that.

The leaders then are inescapably headed for judgment. They have concluded the wrong thing about Jesus. They have concluded the opposite of the truth. They have concluded not only is He not of God, He's devilish. It's over.

Consequently what they have done also, not only have they brought upon themselves greater condemnation, not only have they brought upon themselves eternal damnation and a hotter hell than others, they have also disqualified themselves as the leaders of Israel. They are corrupt. They are vile. They're hypocritical. They're full of iniquity. They're like a tomb, on the outside painted white, on the inside they stink with dead men's bones.

The choosing and commissioning of the Twelve was a judgment on Israel's corrupt leaders. If you look at Luke 22 for just a moment, I think it adds some clarity to this truth. Luke 22 verse 29, Jesus is talking to His disciples, His Apostles who are arguing about who's going to be the greatest. But He says to them in verse 28, of Luke 22, “You stood with Me in My trials. You didn't forsake Me. And just as My Father granted Me a Kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom.” And listen, “You will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”

Why were there twelve of them? Because they were given responsibility, as it were, over each of the tribes of Israel. They were the new leaders of the new Israel. Now obviously Luke 22:29 and 30 is millennial. That's going to be fulfilled in the Millennial Kingdom when the tribes of Israel are again identified and when they are brought to their glorious kingdom in righteousness and salvation and each of those tribes will have a leader, a divine representative over that tribe and it will be one of the

twelve Apostles...Mathias taking the place of Judas. Revelation 21:12 to 14 also says they will be memorialized in eternity forever because the foundations of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, will have their names imbedded there forever in its jeweled foundation.

Twelve Apostles...why twelve? Because they constitute the new spiritual leadership of Israel. An unmistakable message is sent them to the leaders of Israel that they are unqualified, that they are exempted. An unmistakable message is sent to the nation that the corrupt leadership to which they have been subjected is rejected by God, judged and condemned. And this, as I said, escalates to its highest point of condemnation in the final week of our Lord's life in Jerusalem when He pronounces these fierce judgments on the leaders of Israel, recorded in Matthew 23 and when He says He's going to bring the whole system down. Later on even in the gospel of Mark chapter 13, you have the same thing, where He's going to bring the temple down, smash it to the ground, not one stone left on another.

With the coming of Messiah comes a new Covenant. With the coming of a New Covenant comes a new leadership. The Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees, the rabbis, priests, they were liars. They were false teachers, all of them. They misrepresented the Old Testament. They misinterpreted the Old Testament. They corrupted the people. They produced sons of hell. And they're replaced and they are replaced by the most unlikely group of twelve guys, none of whom comes out of the religious world. Not one was a rabbi. Not one was a scribe. Not one was a theologian. Not one was an academic, a priest, a Pharisee, a Sadducee, not one. Which is to demonstrate not only our Lord's scorn for the leadership in general, but is scorned for the whole process of what made a leader in their minds. And this is living proof that the Kingdom of Messiah had no relationship to Judaism, that the nation and its leaders had no connection to God. They thought they knew God. They thought they had the inside track on God. They thought they knew what God desired, what God wanted. They thought they were the protectors and purveyors of the will of God. Nothing could have been further from the truth. They were of their father, Satan. They were the ones who were of the devil.

This is a very, very strong judgment. As Jesus obliterates the spiritual false leadership of Israel and replaces them with a group of non-descript low-life men as if choosing such lowly men itself is also heaping scorn on their supposed elite status, the leaders of Israel. In choosing New Covenant Kingdom leaders, the Lord scorned the entire entourage. This is consistent with His wholesale repudiation of Judaism. The religious nobility and the academy, if you will, of Judaism is all together unqualified to represent God, doesn't know God, has nothing to do with God, operates in the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of Satan. They are apostate legalists who have rejected God, rejected the Word of God and rejected the Son of God.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus attacks their spiritual bankruptcy, pride, hypocrisy, iniquity, cruelty and deceptiveness. And here He pronounces judgment on them while they're planning His murder. The whole religion of Judaism is set aside for the gospel of grace. And in the future, there will be men who

will speak the truth, they will preach the New Covenant gospel. They will preach repentance and forgiveness of sin by faith in Christ alone. They will preach the cross. They will preach the resurrection. But there are none of the leaders of Israel who are qualified for that.

Jesus, of course, never a coward in the face of this kind of hatred continually, boldly indicts these men throughout His ministry and at the same time warns them of the tragic consequences of their rejection of Him and they keep on rejecting Him anyway. And now, the reality of His death looms. He's already had nearly a year in Judea. He has a year-plus ministry in Galilee and then back to Judea and the cross. The cross is getting nearer. Its more vivid. His death looms in His mind. And the question needs to be raised...what's going to happen then? Then what? Who's going to carry on? After they've killed Me, who's going to carry the message?

And here's the plan. These Twelve men...these Twelve men. None of them turned in a resume, by the way. None of them gave a CV, a curriculum vitae, with a list of all their achievements. But they were the ones He chose. They were the ones He wanted...I love that...in verse 13, “He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted. It's a sovereign work, just like salvation. But they were there. They were there for the three years of His life. They were there for His ministry. They were there for His death. Even though they fled when it happened, they knew it happened and they were there to see Him risen from the dead. They're not secondhand eyewitnesses, they're firsthand eyewitnesses and they are the first generation of gospel preachers who preached the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone based on His work on the cross and His resurrection.

It's time now to get Him trained. The months are passing. Oh everything up to now has been a treasure of training but Jesus has spent a lot of times with a multitudes and a lot of time with the crowds and a lot of time healing people. And now it's time to focus. Now it's time to ramp up and intensify the training of the Twelve.

Perhaps the key to understanding what His intentions were comes in verse 14, “He appointed twelve...for two reasons...so they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach.” Now if they were going to be sent out to preach, first they had to be with Him to be trained. So it's that simple twofold purpose. They had to be with Him so He could send them. They weren't going to be able to be sent effectively if they hadn't been with Him and been trained effectively. These twelve men are the hope of the spread of the gospel. These twelve men are the foundation of the church. They're the first ones to fulfill the Great Commission. Remember the Great Commission was given to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel,” Ephesians 2:20, they are the foundation of the church. They are the new leaders of the new kingdom, of the New Covenant. They're the new leaders of the new and true Israel... a divinely selected approved representatives of Christ to preach the new and true covenant of salvation by grace through faith in Christ which alone brings salvation and eternal life.

And they're unique in their calling. Oh yes, they're unique in their calling. They're just not unique in their personalities. Nothing special about them, really. It doesn't say anything about their background. The most we know about them is the name of a father or the name of a brother. Peter and Andrew were brothers. James and John were brothers. And sometimes somebody's father is mentioned. That's all we know. They were the most ordinary.

Turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 1, this is part of divine strategy. You do understand, don't you, that God can use anyone, you understand that, don't you? Because the power is not in the person, the power's within, right? So then why would He choose such lowly ones?

Because then it's never a question of where the power comes from, right? Never. But in 1 Corinthians chapter 1, we get an insight into this. The first insight comes in verse 18, “The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, to those who are being saved is the power of God for it is written, ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside.’”

So we find out at the very outset as Paul kind of lays out the preaching of the gospel, borrowing the language from Isaiah 29:14 that God isn't interested in using the wise and the clever. He's not dependent on them. Verse 20, “Where's the wise men? Where's the scribe? Where's the debater of this age?” Scribe meaning theologian. Where are they? You're not going to find them among the Twelve. You're not going to find them in the early church.

Go down to verse 26, “Consider your calling, brethren.” And this would be true now that you're in to the next generation after the Apostles. “There were not many wise...

“According to the flesh. Not many mighty, not many noble.” In other words, the Lord didn't pick people from among the intellectually elite, the wise. Or from among the influential and powerful, the mighty. Or from among the high born, lofty, noble. But rather, verse 27, and it started with the Apostles, “He chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise.” God chose the weak things of the world to shame the things that are strong, the base and the despised God has chosen, things that are not...the non-existent ones, to nullify the things that are. Purposely God chose the lowest of the low, the foolish and then go down another step, to the weak, go down another step, the base, the no-births, the insignificant. And go down another step, the things that are not, the non-existent ones.

As far as the world was concerned, these Twelve people didn't even exist. As far as the religious establishment of Israel was concerned, they certainly didn't matter as who the Lord chose. And they knew that. Acts 4:13, the elite in Israel looked at Him and said, “What in the world is this, these untrained, uneducated, unskilled people from Galilee.”

And the only explanation they could give for what power they had was...they took note of them that they had been with whom? With Jesus. That was always going to be the explanation. They were never the explanation. Jesus was always the explanation. And, folks, it's that way today. We're not the explanation, Jesus is the explanation. He's alive and powerful, is He not? And He's working in His church. And you could never ever find the secret to what's going on in the Kingdom by looking at the people. You have to look at the power and that comes from Jesus. And the only thing the people can do is make sure they live their lives in such a way that the power flows through them. The Lord doesn't need the wise, He doesn't need the scribes. He doesn't need the debaters. He's happy to show that the power is with Him so that there's never going to be any confusion about whether or not these twelve guys pulled off a world-changing event.

They're going to call, by the way, for a new Israel, a true Israel of God that accepts the Messiah, embraces the cross and the resurrection. And they're going to have an effect. On the day of Pentecost they're going to have their first great meeting. On the day of Pentecost, Peter is going to be their primary spokesman. He's going to get up and he's going to give the gospel and three thousand people are going to be baptized and profess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. And those three thousand are the real deal because they continued in fellowship and prayer and the Apostles' doctrine. And within a few weeks, five thousand more and thousands more and tens of thousands more, and thousands more and thousands more and the rest is history. And here we are. Once under the Old Covenant it was God and twelve tribes. Now it's God, Son and Twelve Apostles and they're going to be the preachers.

You know, I love the simplicity of that organization. I love simplicity. I really do, especially organizational simplicity. I can't think of anything more simple than this...pick twelve guys and pour your power through them. That's what Jesus did. The church hasn't changed, it's the same thing today. Christ is the head of the church, His power flows through the men He picks to be the elders and the pastors and shepherds. That's all the organization needs.

They started out as learners. Disciple is the word *mathetes*, it means learner or student. They ended up as messengers, *apostoloi*. *Apostoloi*means sent ones, messengers. Luke calls these men that 30 times. Luke doesn't use the word Apostle here but Luke uses it 30 times to refer to them...emphasizing not their learning, but they're being sent.

Now that's what's going on here in the text. Go back to Mark chapter 3. The Lord is collecting these twelve to train them to become sent ones, *apostoloi*to take the gospel and be the first generation of preachers of New Covenant salvation truth.

By the way, the word “apostle” is a good word. It's a word that everybody would have understood in Israel. It was an Aramaic word that was common in the vernacular language they used the word, it simply mean...it's the word *shalea*, and what it basically meant was an official representative...an

official representative. And if you were a *shalea*, you came with all the authority and all the rights and all the privileges of the person who had delegated his authority to you. So it traces back to an old Jewish institution of *shalea*where somebody like the Sanhedrin had its *shalea*, the rabbis had their *shalea*, delegated authority to them and they would act in their behalf in matters regarding legal issues and religious issues both.

Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, has all authority over truth. He has all authority over life. And He delegates that authority to these Twelve men as His official representatives. And in Jewish thinking, the *shalea*or the commissioned Apostle acted in the same authority as the one who gave them the commission. So they understood. These men were given serious authority.

Apostle was a title with clout...delegated power. Now I can promise you this, these guys had never had a title with clout. Fishermen isn't that kind of title. Zealot isn't that kind of title. Tax collector isn't that kind of title. Farmer isn't that kind of title. They've now been elevated as the official agents of the divine King to act on His behalf for the benefit and exercise of His authority and Kingdom. This is unbelievable for these men. Wow...how high have they been lifted from such obscurity?

Now let me just give you the sequence so you can kind of get it in mind. Sometimes people get confused about how this calling worked. There are five phases to it. Simple, first of all, phase number one, they were following Jesus. They came and they followed Jesus, drawn by the Father, of course, no man comes after Me less the Father draws him. So they were drawn by the Father to follow Jesus. They were disciples then, learners, students.

There's a second step and we saw this already in chapter 1 with Peter and Andrew, James and John and in chapter 2 of Mark, with Matthew, they left everything to follow Him. So first they were some time followers, part time followers, interested students. The second step was when they left everything. Remember, drop your nets, follow Me. They're still learners but they've now taken a second step, full-time followers.

This is step three, they are called to become Apostles. They're now called in to training, to be with Him intimately 24/7, the intimate group of Twelve for the purpose of sending them out to preach.

Fourthly, later on, they will be sent for the first time to do some preaching. They'll have their sort of inauguration, initiation ministry opportunity. That will be the fourth step when they're finally ready to go and give it a shot.

The fifth step is when they receive the great commission, repeated in Acts 1:8, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel...Judea...Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the uttermost part of the world.

So there really are those five steps. And this is step three, this is right in the middle where they are now having forsaken all students of Jesus and He tells them, “You Twelve are going to be the ones I'm going to train to be My preachers. Down the road I'm going to send you. And finally when I'm gone, you're going to go to the world.”

So this is pretty strategic, isn't it? I mean, this is the future and there is no plan B. Let's look at the text, the calling...just briefly...the calling. “They went up on the mountain,” indefinite mountain, there are a lot to choose from in Galilee around Capernaum, plenty. “And He summoned those whom He Himself wanted and they came to Him.”

By the way, Luke 6:12 which is the parallel passage says He spent the whole night in prayer...prayed all night. Used a verb actually that is only used there in the whole New Testament that means to spend the whole night. Interesting verb. He spent the whole night in prayer and according to Luke 6:12 when the dawn came, He got up. He prayed from dusk to dawn, interceding because this was so critical, such a crucial selection. And then when He knew the will of His Father and He knew what He wanted, He called them to Himself and they came to Him...the Twelve.

By the way, this reminds me of John 15:16, Jesus said to these same Twelve, “You have not chosen Me, but I've chosen you and I have appointed you that you would go and bear fruit and your fruit will remain.” It's like salvation. He chooses us. He chose them.

That's the calling. The commission, what is it they're to do? Verse 14, “He appointed Twelve so they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach...send them out to preach. Jesus was a preacher. John the Baptist before Him was a preacher. The prophets were preachers. And now this is going to be t he first generation of gospel preachers, New Covenant preachers. What is a preacher? Someone who proclaims. Someone who proclaims. And their message is to proclaim the gospel of the Kingdom. So it is a commission to proclaim the gospel. And later on, as I said, they'll be given an opportunity to do that and t hen they'll be given a great commission and sent finally into the world. So the commission is to preach and to preach the gospel.

The confirmation...a lot of preachers roaming around, a lot of rabbis, a lot of teachers, a lot of people saying here's the truth, here's the truth, here's the truth. How do you know these people are speaking the truth? You don't have a New Testament to compare them to. How do you know?

Verse 15, “He gave them authority to cast out the demons.” That would do it. That would do it. No human being has control over the demonic world. Oh there were would-be exorcists around in Judaism, but you remember when the sons of Sceva, Jewish exorcists, tried to cast out the demons and the demon said, “Jesus we know, and Paul we know, but who are you?” We don't react to you.

Matthew 10:1 paralleling this says that when Jesus sent them out He gave them authority over disease, to heal all manner of diseases and over demons. They had divine power to exercise in the physical world and the spiritual world. That's a powerful thing. If you've got three preachers standing in front of you telling you three different things, you're going to believe the one is from God who heals a sick person and who has absolute power over demonic forces...cause you know he has delegated power from God because only God has power over disease and demons.

So our Lord gave the Twelve power over disease, power over demons. That wherever they went to preach the New Covenant gospel of grace and salvation by faith alone in Christ alone, when they spoke people would know it was the truth because of the evidence of supernatural power. Second Corinthians 12:11 and 12 says, “These were the signs of an Apostle in signs and wonders and mighty deeds that confirmed them.”

This is so important to say. You have people running around today who claim to be able to heal people, right? Claim to be able to cast out demons? You see them all the time on television. It's very disturbing to me. All these people claiming healing. The thing that always marks these men, the common denominator is they all have bad theology. They all misinterpret the Bible. They all misinterpret the gospel. They butcher the scriptures. Now why would God authenticate heretics? Come on, how easy is that? If anybody does have power over demons, if you see anybody who does have power over demons, if the Lord were to reinstitute that for some reason, or power...total power over demons and total power over disease...you can be sure that whoever it is, their theology will be biblical because God doesn't authenticate false teachers, especially false teachers whose main goal is to get your money out of your pocket into theirs. These are displays of Kingdom power. These are previews of the glories of millennial powers.

So they went out and they preached. And they were going to be trained to do that. And they showed that they were preaching the truth and they represented the true and living God because of the power over disease and the power over demons.

Well, we've seen a little bit about their...their calling and a little bit about their commission and confirmation. But let's look at the characters then, themselves...just quickly. He appointed the Twelve, that's official, He appointed them. This is their official ordination, the Twelve Apostles...Simon to whom He gave the name Peter and then it goes on to list the rest.

Let me just give you some general observations, okay? Four lists, Matthew, Mark, Luke and Acts, all the same guys. There's really no discrepancies...some differences in their names in the list, and I'll explain that in a minute. The list are not exactly in the same order. Some of the names get mixed a little bit in the list, which is not an issue.

But...listen to this one, this is fascinating to me...group one always has the same four guys. Group two always has the same four. Group three always has the same four. It might get mixed in their group but they're always in the same group. And the first name is always the same...Peter...because he was the leader over everybody. And the first name in group two is always the same, Philip. And the first name in group three is always the same...James, the son of Alphaeus. So there were three groups, everybody kind of stayed in his group and each group had its own leader. Just naturally among four men somebody would rise to be the recognized leader. In the case of the whole group, it was Peter. In the case of group two it was Philip. In the case of group three, it was James the son of Alphaeus.

It's also important to notice that Peter's name is always first because he is such a dominant force among the men. But as you go down the list, Peter is so dominant, and as you go down the list there's a decreasing sense in which we know anything about these men till you get to the last name which is always Judas, for obvious reasons, because he was the most despised and they kept him for last. But we don't know much about them. We know about group one the most. Peter, Andrew, James and John, two sets of brothers, particularly Peter, James and John, the more intimate group. We don't know much about group three, a little bit about Philip...group two rather, a little bit about Philip...Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, a little bit about them.

We know little or nothing about James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus and Simon the Zealot. So what you have is twelve men who didn't all have the same intimacy with Jesus. You can't do that even with twelve men. You can't do that even with twelve men. There were three that were internal confidants of Jesus, very intimate. And there was a fourth kind of on the edge of that, Andrew. Group two, we read about less, they don't appear. Group three, hardly ever and yet they were all given the same power, the same authority, the same message to preach and they all went out and did exactly what they were called to do. But during the time of their training, they were not all as much in the forefront of action as the group that we are familiar with at the beginning. But their names are all on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. And they would each reign over one of the tribes of Israel in the Millennial Kingdom. And they were all the preachers of the New Covenant glory.

The last name is always Judas and it's always with a comment and the comment is always the same, “Judas who betrayed Him,” or “Judas who was a traitor.” In the case of the list in Acts, Judas isn't named because he's dead by then and replaced by Mathias.

Well let's look. Simon, Jesus gave him a nickname, Peter...rock. And the only time Jesus called him Simon was when he was acting like his old self. He was the closest to Christ, the spokesman, the leader, the most notable preacher, he's the dominant preacher in the first twelve chapters of Acts. He's the dominant preacher among the Apostles in the record of the book of Acts. It doesn't mean the others weren't preaching, they were out there in different places preaching. We'll see more about him as the story unfolds. But the Lord wanted him to be a rock and so He gave him a nickname that would

remind him what he needed to be.

And then there's James the son of Zebedee, and John the brother of James. These brothers we already met in chapter 1. Jesus called them. They were fishermen along with Peter and Andrew. Their father, Zebedee...now we don't know anything about Zebedee except a half a dozen times in the New Testament they're identified as the sons of Zebedee. Now if they keep mentioning this guy, he must have been a significant guy. We don't have any history of Zebedee, but the fact that he is so often mentioned means that he must have been a man of some importance. When you get toward John 18, toward the end of the ministry of Jesus, you get into the time of His arrest and trial and all that. It tells us that John...John the son of Zebedee was known to the High Priest.

Well how would a humble fisherman from Galilee be known to the High Priest? Maybe it was Zebedee that had the connection. Maybe Zebedee was an important guy and had some connections with the High Priest, who knows? Maybe it was Zebedee's fish that the High Priest preferred. Who knows?

But anyway, what happened was, Peter wanted access to the courtyard during the trial of Christ and John was able to get him that access because of his connection. So Zebedee must perhaps have been a guy with some connections, that's all we know.

But Jesus gave a nickname to these two also. To them He gave the name “Boanerges,” which means “Sons of Thunder.” We would translate that “Hot Heads.” I think He gave Peter a name to remind Peter of what He wanted him to be, and He gave them names that reminded them of what He didn't want them to be.

I remember growing up as a kid, my Dad used to say to me all the time, “You'll never amount to a hill of beans. You'll never amount to a hill of beans...You'll never amount to a hill of beans.” That was sort of a negative reinforcement, I guess, I don't know. But there are a lot of ways to motivate people. That motivated me. I wanted to amount to a hill of beans. Sometimes, you know, I remember, Tommy Lasorda when he first came across Orrel Hirschizer(??) a good pitcher, he thought he was too weak and whimpy so he gave him the nickname Bulldog and eventually he became Bulldog. So sometimes you use a name to reinforce somebody into what you want them to be. Sometimes you use a name to reinforce what you don't want them to be. And calling these two guys “hot heads” must have been a constant reminder of what they needed to avoid. You remember in Luke 9 they went into town, the people didn't treat them very well and they came to Jesus and said, “Okay, you want us to call down fire from heaven and burn them to a crisp? I mean, we're evangelists, you know, we're not terrorists. We don't...we don't burn people up.”

And then there was Andrew and Philip. Philip, as I said, is the leader of group two. He's from Bethsaida, according to John 1:44, so he probably knew the four before him. He probably knew all

the rest. He may have been a Hellenized Jew. They may have known each other. And they were all fishermen up in that area.

Then there's Bartholomew, that's interesting because Bartholomew is not really a name. Bar is “son of” and *tholome*is a name, so he's the son of *Tholome*. His actual name was Nathanael...Nathanael Bartholomew, Nathanael the son of Tholome. Nathanael means “God has given.” That was likely his actual name.

Then there's Matthew. We met him in Mark chapter 2 verses 13 and following. The tax collector, hated and despised by everybody, he would have been hated and despised by the other eleven frankly for what he did.

And then there's Thomas, according to John 11:16, he was a twin called Didymus, meaning the twin. He may have had a twin brother, twin sister. He is the restored doubter, we all kind of identify with Thomas in our times of doubt.

Then there's James, the son of Alphaeus. We don't know anything about Alphaeus. Frankly, we don't know anything about James. He is always the first name in the final group. His mother is mentioned. His mother is named Mary and she's a follower of Christ. Mark 16:40 he has a mother named Mary who follows Christ. There he is called James the Less. This is another nickname. He's like the inferior James to the big James. Or he's like the...the word is actually *mikros*so it may be that he was just a little guy. So he's nicknamed James the Little Guy.

I just love the intimacy of this. I love the simplicity of this. This is just a bunch of guys who are all throwing nicknames around and calling each other these things. Then there's Thaddaeus, I love that. Don't name your son Thaddaeus. I love Thaddaeus but his real name is Judas, son of James...Judas from Judah great noble name, even though it's ignoble in the case of Judas Iscariot. Judas son of James is his official name in Luke 6:16 and Acts 1:13. He is even referred to in John 14:22 as Judas, not Iscariot...not Iscariot.

But he's also called Thaddaeus and Lebbaeus. Those are nicknames. Thaddaeus means “mamma's boy.” Really not a high, noble name to follow you into adulthood. You've got to shake that one at some point. And Lebbaeus, he's also called Lebbaeus, means “heart child,” which would be another way to call him “mamma's boy.”

So you just get the picture of these twelve guys with all their nicknames, rubbing it in, identifying everybody's weakness, everybody's bad side, down side and labeling these things and reinforcing the teasing, the haranguing, and then you throw James and John in there and they get their mother to go to Jesus and get Him to appoint them on the right and the left hand in the Kingdom because they want to be the greatest. This is a very, very, very unlikely group to accomplish anything.

Then there's Simon the Zealot. He is called “Simon the Cananian and some people think that means the Cananite, it doesn't. It's from the Hebrew word *qanna*which means to be zealous. He was a Zealot so guess what they called him, “Simon the Zealot.” So they just rubbed it in, a political revolutionary with a hot head.

Then there's Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him, the saddest....I think the saddest human being that ever lived. The greatest story of opportunity ever, right? Three years 24/7 with Jesus and you do what he did? Can hell be hotter for anybody than it is for him? A massive forfeiture of privilege and extreme eternal punishment for rejection.

Well, this is an interesting group. Nobody would predict that they would change the world...nobody. They became the recipients of divine revelation, according to Ephesians 3. They were the true teachers of sound doctrine, the Apostles' doctrine. They were the foundational stones of the church, Ephesians 2:20. They were the early edifiers of the believers. He gave to the church...what?...Apostles, prophets for the work of the ministry, for the building up for the body of Christ. They were examples of virtues. The New Testament calls them holy Apostles. Wow.

Their message was confirmed by signs and wonders and mighty deeds. They will reign over the Twelve tribes of Israel and they are on the foundation stones of the New Jerusalem. In spite of the fact, folks, listen to this, you lack understanding, you're stupid. You lack humility, you're proud. You lack faith, how is it you have no faith He said in Mark 4:40. You lack power, they came back in Matthew 17 and they couldn't do any miracles. So how do you deal with people who lack understanding, lack humility, lack faith and lack power? They were uneducated and untrained.

But before the story was actually over, they had turned the world upside down, Acts 17:6. Ordinary in every way they were laymen, they were laborers, they worked with their hands. They were prone to all the sins, all the errors in judgment, all the bad attitudes, all the lapses of faith and all the failures. As ordinary as they were, they were given the highest calling, the highest commission ever held by any human being. And, folks, I tell you this, as a believer today, you stand in their heritage for the Great Commission is yours today, isn't it?

What happened to these guys? According to tradition handed down from the early church, the same fate fell all the Apostles except John who was exiled to the isle of Patmos. Peter was crucified upside down at his request according to Eusebius. His brother Andrew reportedly was also crucified, tied instead of nailed to a cross to prolong his suffering. James the brother of John is the only Apostle whose death is recorded in Scripture. He was executed by Herod Agrippa. Philip was said to have been stoned to death in Asia Minor but not before multitudes came to faith in Christ through his preaching.

The traditions vary concerning how Philip's close companion Nathanael, Bartholomew, died. Some say he was bound and thrown into the sea. Others said he was crucified. Matthew may have been burned at the stake. Thomas likely reached India where some traditions say he was killed with a spear. According to the Apocryphal martyrdom of James, James the son of Alphaeus was stoned to death by the Jews for preaching Christ. Simon the Zealot according to some traditions preached the gospel in Egypt, North Africa and Persia where he was martyred by being sawn in half like Isaiah. Other traditions say he was eventually crucified by the Romans. Thaddaeus, mamma's boy, was a preacher of the gospel in modern Turkey and he was clubbed to death.

No backup plan, and no backup crew and a risky strategy, wouldn't you say? But these men are not the explanation for the advance of the gospel. They were available and they were empowered and the gospel went over the whole world and continues to do so as a legacy to their faithfulness. Our Lord uses ordinary, weak, failing, ignorant saints...guess why? The only kind there are. Welcome to the group.

Father, we thank You for this wonderful text. We thank You for its rich insights. We thank You for the fact that You still use ordinary people. Use us, we pray, for Your glory in Christ's name. Amen.

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