

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

Common Men, Uncommon Calling

Scripture: Luke 6:12-13

Code: 42-71

We begin a wonderful adventure in our study of the gospel of Luke, this morning, and let me invite you to open to the sixth chapter. Take your Bible and look at Luke chapter 6. We come to verses 12 through 16. Here we are introduced to the Twelve Apostles and we're going to call the series "The Master's Men." The Twelve Apostles are introduced to us in this important text.

I want to read the text for you and then we'll introduce this study and before we're done, in the weeks to come, we will get to know each one of these Twelve men as well as we possibly can, given what is in Scripture about them. Verse 12, "And it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. And when day came He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them whom He also named as Apostles; Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother and James and John and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas the son of James and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor."

You're going to find the study of these twelve men very, very interesting. You're also going to find it very, very encouraging because you're going to find that these were very common men, called and equipped and empowered for a very uncommon ministry. And this is consistent with what God does. He deals with the common, the *hoi polloi*, if you will. And He lifts them up to amazing, inexplicable usefulness. And when their lives have a powerful impact on the world, it is clear to everybody that it can't be because of them, and consequently all the glory goes to God.

Now I want you to notice the opening phrase in verse 12. "And it was at this time..." We're not talking about clock time, it isn't nine o'clock in the morning, or three o'clock in the afternoon. We're not talking about a certain week, it isn't on a Tuesday or a Thursday, we don't know what day. We're not talking about a certain month here, this is not chronology. Well, what time is he talking about? The time in the sense of the season, the era, the period. And it is a period very easily defined for us. In the flow of Luke's record about the life of Christ, back in chapter 5 and verse 17 we were introduced to the Pharisees and the scribes, teachers of the law. Since we were introduced to them in chapter 5 verse 17, all the way through the end of chapter 5 through the beginning of chapter 6, now into chapter 6 verse 11, we have been watching escalating conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders of Judaism. And that conflict has reached a high point in verse 11 of chapter 6. They themselves, referring to the scribes and Pharisees, were filled with rage and discussed together what they might do to Jesus. In Mark's gospel and Matthew's gospel it says that what they wanted to do to Him was

destroy Him. They wanted to murder Him. It is at that time that we break into the scene that begins in verse 12. It is the time of escalating hostility. It is the time of the hatred of Jesus among the religious leaders of Judaism and it has reached its apex. It is precisely at that time that Jesus can feel the heat of His coming death. It is less than two years away and He will be executed and after His execution He shall rise from the dead, He will remain on earth for 40 days and then He will ascend to the Father and His earthly work will have to be handed off to somebody else.

It is time then to prepare His official representatives. And so, Jesus feeling the hatred, feeling the hostility, sensing the inevitability of His execution coming realizes that there are going to have to be some key men who can carry on the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of Israel and the establishment of the church and there isn't very much time left before they're going to have to go out on their own. Now is the time to choose them. Now is the time to begin their intense training. And so it's in the sense of His own coming death that Jesus realizes that He has to choose some who are going to carry on the work after He's gone.

There's also another striking reality in this, that when Jesus chooses the Twelve to be His official representatives, the official preachers of the gospel who will carry not only His message but His authority, He doesn't choose a rabbi. He doesn't choose a scribe. He doesn't choose a Pharisee. He doesn't choose a Sadducee. He doesn't choose a priest, not one of them. And so, it is true to say that the choosing of the Twelve Apostles was not only preparation for His own death and the future proclamation of the gospel, but it was also a judgment on Judaism. It was a judgment on the current corrupt leaders of Israel's religion. The Lord didn't choose one of them, He chose men who were not theologically trained, who were not scribes, not priests, not Pharisees, not Sadducees. He chose men who were common men.

Four of them were fishermen. One of them was a tax collector. One of them was a money grubber who turned out to be a traitor. We don't know the occupations of the rest of them, but they were commoners. Jesus totally ignored the religious establishment, totally ignored the theologically trained, those who saw themselves as the religious nobilities of Israel. The reason was because they resented Him, they hated Him. They rejected Him and His message. John put it this way in his gospel, chapter 1 verse 11, "He came unto His own and His own received Him not." And that was especially true of the religious leaders of Judaism. In fact, in the first official act of Jesus' ministry, He launched His ministry, the first official act that He did when He began His ministry was He went to Jerusalem at the Passover time when it was most populated of all the times of the year when the temple was filled with all of the people coming to celebrate the Passover and offer sacrifice, He went right into the temple, according to the second chapter of John, He made a whip and He struck a devastating blow at the religion of Judaism. He struck a blow at the religious nobility. He exposed their bankruptcy spiritually. He exposed their apostasy. He exposed their sin. He exposed their corruption. He exposed their deception. That's how He started His ministry by an all-out assault on the established religion.

And now, many months later, months into His Galilean ministry along ways from Jerusalem up into Galilee, that resentment that must have been inaugurated at that first event has reached a fever pitch and they are blood thirsty to the point where they're doing everything they can to come up with a scheme to execute Him. The whole religious establishment is hostile to God's gospel, hostile to grace, hostile to repentance, hostile to forgiveness and hostile to faith. In spite of the miracles which have proven His messiahship, in spite of the casting out of demons and literally the destruction of the kingdom of darkness, they will not accept the fact that He is God in human flesh. They reject Him. They reject His message. And now their hatred has reached the point where they seek His murder. And feeling the heat of that, Jesus knows that now is the time to start training the men who are going to take over after He's gone. And as I said, He can't pick any of them, they are uniformly in opposition to Him.

So, it's time now. It's time to identify the Twelve Apostles. If you've visited cathedrals here and in Europe you might assume that the Apostles were stained-glass saints who somehow should be exalted to some high degree of spirituality. The fact of the matter is, they were very, very common men.

Sad to say we don't make much of them. Oh we make a little bit about Peter because he's dominant in the gospel account. We make a lot out of Paul who was a late Apostle and who was actually a Pharisee. We make something out of James and something out of John, maybe a little bit out of Philip and Andrew and something, at least, about the story of Matthew and we identify with him because he wrote his gospel. But for the most part, they're not heroes to us and that's sad. I've been reading the biography of William Tyndale who was concerned that the people who went to church in England in his day heard the Bible in Latin and not in their own language, English. And so he was concerned to translate the Bible into English. The church, believe it or not, didn't want the Bible in the language of the people because the church thought they would lose power. So they killed William Tyndale after he had done his work of translation. Many of the phrases you still use in English he devised and developed in his English translation. But one of the reasons Tyndale was prompted to the translation was that he did a survey of the clergy and the clergy didn't know who the Twelve Apostles were. I wouldn't want to do a survey of you just adlib, or of any church because I'm afraid you might sort of run dry at about number seven or eight if you got that far, and you might know Judas.

But there is so much to know about these men. And we know about a lot of heroes through the years, but when you get to heaven some day and you walk through those gates of the city, the New Jerusalem, the glorious city of New Jerusalem, when you walk through those gates, those twelve gates, three on each side, it's a four-square city, when you walk through those gates at the top of each gate there's going to be a name and the name at the top of the gate is going to be one of the twelve tribes of Israel. But there's going to be a name at the bottom of every gate and the name at the bottom of every gate is going to be the name of an Apostle. They are going to have an eternal tribute

in heaven and you ought to know about them and you ought to know all there is about them from the text of Scripture and from history. And you're going to find this is tremendously encouraging because God was able to do so much with so little...and that gives us all hope, doesn't it?

So here we are in this wonderful text in which Jesus selects twelve men. And I want to get them out of the stained-glass window and down to earth. I want to get them out of obscurity and into your mind. I want you always to know exactly who you're talking about when somebody says...who was Bartholomew? Or when somebody says...who was James the son of Alphaeus? Or when somebody says...who was Simon the Zealot? I want you to know how to answer that and I want you to understand who really are the great spiritual heroes who will be honored forever in the foundation of heaven's gates.

Here we are then at their selection. They become, and this is what I want you to understand, because the Lord cannot choose any from the leadership of Israel, they become the new and true spiritual leaders for Israel. They're going to go and preach the gospel. They're going to preach the New Covenant. They are the new and true spiritual leaders in Israel to preach the new and true covenant of salvation by grace and faith and to bring about a new and true Israel of God, a genuinely repentant and believing Israel...as well as to give birth to the church. None of the religious elite of Israel qualify, so the Lord choose twelve very, very ordinary men and that is consistent with the way the Lord works.

Turn in your Bible to 1 Corinthians chapter 1 for a moment. Paul recognizing this under inspiration writes, verse 20, "Where's the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where's the debater of this age? Where is the brilliant mind? Where is the brilliant writer? Where is the great orator of this day?" We're looking at the church and we're saying...where are they? "They're not there because God has made foolish the wisdom of the world for since in the wisdom of God the world in its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believed."

It was a foolish message and foolish preachers. It was beneath the elite. You look at the church and you ask...where are the massive minds of the world and where are the great writers and the great orators of the world? They're not there. And that's because down in verse 26, "There were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble. But God 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 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen the things that are not." They're so far down the list, it's as if they don't even exist...the nobodies that they might nullify the somebodies in order that no man should boast before God.

In other words, in the end God chooses who He chooses in order that He might receive the glory. He chooses whom He chooses in order that people might say...It can't be through him that this was accomplished, it must be God. And so He chose four fishermen, at least, maybe the others...some of

the others were fishermen. He chose a despised tax collector. He chose a traitorous money grubber and the rest of the no-name commoners. And by them changed the world forever.

Now the account, as I said, is rich in encouragement for us and you'll see that even this morning. Now next Sunday I want to mention to you Dr. Al Moler(?) will be here, president of Southern Seminary, because he's the graduation speaker of the college and the seminary. You have seen him a number of times on Larry King where he has brought sanity and biblical understanding to those crazy debates that they have about religion. He's a good friend and a profound man in terms of the knowledge of the Word of God, you're going to be greatly blessed. Since he's here for graduation, I encouraged him to preach for us on Sunday morning. But the next week after that we'll get back and we'll meet the first of the Apostles, Simon Peter. But for this morning I want to give you a general look that you're going to find very encouraging.

Back to verse 12. It was at this time, at this crucial time that Jesus felt His impending death, experienced the hostility of the religious leaders, knew it was time to start training the men who were going to be the keys to carrying the gospel after He was gone. And so knowing what a crucial time it was, He went off to the mountain to pray. This is something we've already been introduced to as a pattern in the life of Jesus. Chapter 5 verse 16 He Himself would often slip away to the wilderness and pray. He was always under the pressure of the people when He was down in the cities and the towns and villages and the lowlands where He was easily accessible and often He would have to get away to find tranquility, to find solitude and communion with the Lord. And that's exactly what we find here.

We don't know what mountain it was. If it mattered the Lord would tell us. There are lots of hills and mountains around the Galilee area, around the city of Capernaum which is at the very top of the Sea of Galilee, plenty of places to choose from. And as He often did, He sought out solitude, particularly in anticipation of very crucial events, and very crucial ministries. Here is Jesus in His true humanity. Here is Jesus as the true man, realizing that He is standing in a very, very volatile situation. There is hostility against Him that is going to bring about His death. There is a very brief amount of time to train the men who are going to carry the gospel after He is gone. The crucial reality of those matters drive Him into this mountain to pray to God. Because He is man, fully man, because He humbled Himself and took upon Himself the form of man, He set aside the use of His attributes, He set aside the independent exercise of His attributes and submitted Himself to that which God desired Him to do and allowed Him to do. And so He goes as a man would go, to ask God what He should do in this crisis. The Lord obviously directs Him to choose the Apostles, and the Lord obviously directed, the Lord God directed Him as to whom He should choose.

And so, He goes into the mountain and it says He spent the whole night in prayer to God. If He went up there when it was still light, He would have gone up there somewhere around seven o'clock or eight o'clock. And if He came back when it was dawn, He would have come back at six in the

morning. It says He spent the whole night. To spend the whole night is a lot of words in English, it's one word in Greek. It's a very interesting word, it's a very rare word, it's what we call hapax logomina(?) which means it's only used once in the Bible. It's the word *diaknuktereuo* and it literally means to endure through the night. You wouldn't use it if you were just saying...it was dark all night, or I slept all night. You would only use it to express some effort that went on through the night. And so it conveys the idea that He was awake all through the darkness and that He was enduring and persevering with this immense weight upon Him knowing that He was headed for death, knowing that He had to choose the Twelve because the training time was limited, and wanting to pick just exactly the ones that God desired. Luke expresses it with the use of that rare word...He endured through the whole night awake in prayer.

Another interesting note in the Greek language you don't see in the English, it says at the end of verse 12 He spent the whole night in prayer TO God. Actually in Greek it says...He spent the whole night in the prayer of God. And we find that He was not only man, but here He is God. It is the prayer of God. And what that indicates to us is that He is now engaged in inter-trinitarian communion. It is the very prayer of God that is going on there as the two members of the trinity are communing with one another. So here is Jesus in His humanity having to pray all night to get clarity on this matter and Jesus in His deity praying the very prayer of God. What that means is, His prayers were all perfectly consistent with the mind and will of God for He Himself was also God. And therein do we see again the incredible mystery of His humanity and His deity brought together.

So here as His ministry reaches a crisis point, He finds solitude with God, the solitude that requires ten, twelve hours of prayer in order to have clarity as to the will of God. And verse 13 says, "When day came, the prayer was over, the night of prayer was ended, He went down...implied...and called His disciples to Him."

Now let me tell you, right here is where "disciple" is indiscriminate. It is the word in Greek, I guess the best English equivalent is "student...student." We could use the word "follower." It's the word *mathetes*. I suppose maybe even a more precise word would be "learner." Sometimes you think of a student as somebody who goes to school but doesn't necessarily learn anything...so maybe "learner" is better.

What happened in ancient times, both in the Greek culture and the Jewish culture is when there was a prominent rabbi or a prominent orator, prominent philosopher, prominent teacher, they would attract people. It's still true today. Still true today. Only in those days they wouldn't go to an auditorium to hear this person speak, or listen to his tapes or read his books, since those things were not available to them. They would follow him around and typically they were itinerant teachers who went from place to place and taught the way that Jesus did and they would collect followers. We know obviously that Jesus collected a massive amount of followers because His teaching was absolutely beyond anything anybody had ever heard, it was without equal, because He had the ability to heal

diseases and cast out demons and do miraculous things including controlling fish, as He did in the fishing incident in the fifth chapter here, because He had all of this supernatural power and His profound supernatural truth, He drew people at a rate that nobody else had ever drawn them. And so He had a great number of disciples.

In fact, back in chapter 6, "It came about that on a certain Sabbath He was passing through some grain fields, His disciples were picking..." and so forth. We don't know how many there were, there might have been fifty, there might have been a hundred, there might have been more, but there probably weren't twelve because at that point the Twelve hadn't been identified. So these would just be followers. If you read John 6, many people were following Jesus. In John 6, opens up, He feeds the five thousand men, right? Five thousand men mean at least five thousand women cause they were mostly married, of course and if you have five thousand men, five thousand women, you might have twenty thousand kids. So He fed a huge crowd. It could have been twenty to thirty thousand people. And they said...This is it, this is the Messiah, free food. They spend most of their life trying to get a field. They did all their farming, raised all their animals to provide food, and they had to harvest it and they had to prepare it and they had to cook it and they had to do all that, life was really all about eating in those days. And here comes somebody who just creates food, just creates food. This changes life. What they could see was leisure and free food, pre-prepared, sort of like we live today. But they follow Jesus for that reason and then John 6, at the end of the chapter, Jesus said, "If you're not willing to eat My flesh and drink My blood, you're not going to be My disciple in the end." And it says many of His disciples turned away and left, right? So He had people coming and going. People attracted and then people disillusioned who went away and He even said to the disciples, the particular ones He was focused on, He said to them, "Are you also going to go away?" And you remember Peter said, "To whom shall we go? You and You alone have the words of eternal life." So there were some disciples who came and stayed, some who came and went. There was a coming and a going and I think as He went from place to place the crowd shifted a little bit.

But there were some disciples who didn't just come on their own. They may have come on their own initially, but He drew them in, in particular. And we've already met them in the gospel record. You can go back to John chapter 1 and you're going to find Peter and Andrew and Nathanael, right? You can go back to Luke chapter 5 and you're going to find Jesus meeting James, John and Peter again in the fishing environment. And then you're going to find Him finding the tax collecting station of Levi or Matthew. And so, He drew them out. They're among these disciples, some that the Lord had pulled in initially.

But now out of this large group, some who came on their own, some that He has already identified and asked to follow Him, out of that group, that collected group, the Lord is going to pick twelve. By the will of God revealed in that night of prayer, He knows exactly who they are. And so He calls all the disciples together, all the learners, all the mathetes, all of His students and it says in verse 13 He chose twelve of them. Right there in front of everybody He chose twelve of them.

This was a very special moment for those twelve. Up to this point, Peter, James, John, Andrew, Nathanael, Matthew, they were just in the crowd. They were just learners. They were just sort of following and listening and observing and watching and absorbing. But they didn't yet have any specific purpose. They hadn't yet been called to any specific office or given any specific responsibility until this moment. Twelve of them are chosen. John 15:16, Jesus said to them later on, "Remember, you have not chosen Me...but what?...I've chosen you."

Why twelve? Why not eight, why not twenty-four, why twelve? Answer, because there were twelve tribes in Israel. You say, "Well why does that matter?" Because this was symbolic. Israel was apostate. The Judaism of the time of Jesus was not...was not the truth of the Old Testament. It was not the true worship of the true God. It was a system of self-righteous works and ceremonies, it was apostate, it was heretical. And it was time for a new leadership in Israel and the Apostles were the new leaders of the new, true Israel of God who would believe the gospel. And the fact that there were twelve symbolizes that Jesus is calling for a new leadership for the whole nation.

It also, as I said, is a judgment on the current leadership. These Apostles were the new leaders bringing the New Covenant message for a new Israel.

To show you the link specifically, look at Luke 22 verse 29, and Jesus says this to the disciples. He's talking to the Apostles actually here, and He says, "Just as My Father...Luke 22:29...just as My Father granted Me a Kingdom," stop there. That's the millennial Kingdom, that's the future Kingdom of Christ. God has granted Me a Kingdom and some day I'm going to come into that Kingdom, "Just as the Father granted Me a Kingdom, I'm going to grant you something. I'm going to grant that you may eat and drink at My table in My Kingdom." Hey, you're going to be in My Kingdom. I'm going to grant that you are there when I receive My Kingdom, when I reign on the throne of David in the city of Jerusalem, Mount Zion, when I rule the world in the Kingdom coming, I am going to grant you to sit at My table and eat and drink in My Kingdom. And, end of verse 30, "You will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

That proves the point that the Apostles were chosen to be the leaders over a new Israel and some day in the Kingdom, the Millennial Kingdom, each tribe of Israel, each tribe will then be made up of believing Jews, we know the twelve tribes are going to be identified, aren't they?, in the time of Tribulation because twelve thousand out of every tribe will be chosen to preach the gospel, totaling 144 thousand. All Israel will be saved. There will be converted people out of every tribe in Israel. They will go into the Kingdom. Each of those tribes will therefore be identified and one of the Apostles will literally sit on a throne ruling over that new spiritual true believing Israel.

So the Apostles are significant. They weren't just...they weren't just destined for commonality. During the Millennial Kingdom they are going to sit on thrones and rule the tribes of Israel. Then look at

Revelation 21. In the end of the book of Revelation you have description of heaven and you have a description of the heavenly Jerusalem, the holy city. And just very briefly, verses 12 to 14 of Revelation 21, this city has surround it a high wall, great and high wall, twelve gates and on the top of the gates is written the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. You have the children of Jacob, the twelve sons of Jacob that identify the twelve tribes and all their names are on the tops of the gates. That's not all, down in verse 14, and the wall of the city, apparently at the same point, had twelve foundation stones and on them were the twelve names of the Twelve Apostles of the Lamb. This...not only are they going to reign in the Millennial Kingdom, but they're going to be immortalized eternally in the foundation, their name is going to be emblazoned in the gold foundations of the holy city, the New Jerusalem, forever and ever and ever. Every time you go into the city you're going to go over the name of an Apostle and under the name of the tribes of Israel. This is to show that God once brought the truth of His saving message through the tribes of Israel, and then again later on through the Twelve Apostles.

Now these men are important then. They are eternally important. I don't want you wandering through the gate and not knowing whose name is below you, okay? So we want to learn about these men here.

It says in verse 13, "Having chosen them, He named them as Apostles." It's an important word. The Greek verb *apostellō* means "to send." To send...*apō* is a preposition means from, to send from...to send away. These are sent ones. In fact, the word *apostolos* the noun, it can be translated almost...well it is translated in an alliterated way...or, it's just transliterated way, I should say, instead of translating the Greek word "apostle, *apostolos*, we just give it an English pronunciation apostle instead of mean...if you translated it, it would mean "sent one." But they transliterate it and it's apostles and its become a very, very significant word for us in our Christian vocabulary.

It actually could be traced back to the Aramaic. The common language in Israel was not Hebrew, the common language was Aramaic and there was a Jewish institution at the time of our Lord called *Shahlia*(??) which is an Aramaic word for apostle. And the *Shahlia* referred to any official representative of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was a group of 70 men, that's what Sanhedrin basically means, the seventy, a group of 70 men who ruled Israel. But they had a tremendous amount of power and a tremendous amount of authority. What they did was, they delegated that to official representatives and they would send them out with all of their authority to act in their behalf, usually to settle legal disputes, disputes about the law of God, or religious disputes. Famous prominent rabbis also had *Shahlia*, they had sent ones who would carry their authority and teach their message and represent them. So the Jewish people were very used to apostles, very used to those who were the official representatives of authoritative persons. And that's exactly what Jesus is doing here, He's saying something very familiar to everybody...I am going to have My own *Shahlia*, I am going to have My own apostles just as the Sanhedrin does, just as the famous rabbis always have, I'm going to have My own sent ones who are going to bear the authority that I have, the power that I have, the

doctrine that I have.

What Jesus here has then is twelve men to whom He will delegate His power, delegate His authority, delegate His message and they will go and represent Him as official representatives. The Jews understood this in the Jewish Mishna, which is ancient Jewish writing, it says this, quote: "The one sent by the man is as the man himself." So they understood this kind of identity, a commissioned representative they knew acted with the same authority as the one who sent him. An apostle then was a title of great respect, a title of great honor and a title of privilege and a title of authority because it bore with it power. Jesus is saying...I'm now identifying you twelve as My official representatives.

Mark chapter 3 records this same event. Listen to what Mark adds, "And He appointed twelve that they might be with Him." I want to stop there for a minute. "That they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach." There's a two-step process here. Before they could be sent out to preach, before they could be sent out they had to be pulled in. It was absolutely critical that they be with Jesus before they be sent out. This was critical to their training. In fact, it isn't until chapter 9 of Luke, if you look at chapter 9 verse 1, you will see that it is in chapter 9 that Jesus calls the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. He literally delegated to them His miracle power. Now it isn't till chapter 9 that He does that, it's paralleled in Matthew 10. We're not there yet. Here He is just identifying them and pulling them in. The next step, He will give them miracle power, power to cast out demons. And the last step, of course, finally He'll send them out. So here we have Him, in the words of Luke, drawing them near to Him. It's time to pick these twelve, pull them intimately in.

Up to this point, Jesus was speaking to a huge crowd all the time, to a large group of followers, but hadn't yet identified that intimate twelve. They will not be officially commissioned and granted His full authority to cast out demons and heal the sick until chapter 9. But here is their initial entitlement as apostles. And you can see the flow all through. First there was their...their following Jesus, their first call to be disciples and for many of them that was their conversion. Then there was a secondary time when they were called to leave everything. At first they could follow or not follow, come and go and they were holding on to their former life, like Peter and his fishing. But in chapter 5, Jesus, you remember, said to Peter, James and John, "No more fishing," right? And they left everything and followed Him.

So first they were called to believe in Him. Then they were called to drop everything and follow Him. And now out of that group who have dropped everything and followed Him, He called them to Himself, He called them to drop everything, and now He identifies them as apostles. Later He will gift them miraculously and finally He will send them out. They will go out on short-term mission opportunities to preach and heal and do great miracles and then they'll come back. They'll go out and come back, they'll go out and they'll come back. Finally He leaves and they go out for good on their own. These are the apostles. Luke mentions them six times in his gospel and about 30 times in the

book of Acts because their role is so central not only to the ministry of the gospel to Israel, as Luke records it in his gospel, but the founding of the church as he records it in the book of Acts.

Now let me tell you why they were important, just giving you some general stuff as we close in the next few minutes. They were important because they were the real foundation of the church. Ephesians 2:20 says the church was built on the Apostles and the prophets, Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone. They were the real foundation of the church, they were the first spiritual leaders of the new Israel and the church.

Secondly, they received truth by divine revelation. That's Ephesians 3:5, very explicit, it says, "To them was made known the mystery of Christ as it has now been revealed through His holy Apostles and prophets by the Spirit." They didn't preach a human message, they had divine revelation. They were then the foundation of the church and the receivers, or recipients of divine revelation.

Thirdly, they were the source of doctrine...doctrine. When the early church meets in the book of Acts for the first time, Acts 2, it says they got together and studied the Apostles' doctrine...the Apostles' doctrine, Acts 2:42. So they were critical, they were the first line of people in the life of the new Israel and the church. They were the instruments of the gospel foundationally. They were recipients of divine revelation which shows up in the New Testament epistles and they were the source of doctrine.

Also, they were given to edify the church. Ephesians 4:11 says, "He gave to the church Apostles and prophets for the edification of the church." They were the early teachers. They were the first preachers and first teachers in the church.

Next, they were examples of virtue. I just read you Ephesians 3:5 where they're called holy Apostles, holy apostles. They set a standard for godliness and virtue, spirituality. They were the first examples for believers to follow.

Not only that, they were given miracle power to confirm their message. Second Corinthians 12:11 and 12 says that God confirmed His Word through the Apostles by signs and wonders and mighty deeds...remarkable group. They were the first preachers of the gospel, to bring about salvation to the new Israel of God and salvation in the Gentiles and the church. They were the recipients of direct revelation, the unfolding of the mystery of Christ which they preached and which they wrote and now makes up the New Testament. They were the founders of doctrine which establishes the truth of God for the church. They were the early edifiers, preachers and teachers of believers. They were the first examples of virtue and they were the first, I should say they were the primary and only men who have been given miracle power by the Lord Jesus to confirm their preaching as true and from God.

And as a result, you might expect, they were greatly blessed...greatly, greatly blessed. In the eighteenth chapter of Luke, the disciples were concerned about the way things were going and what

might happen to them, and Peter says in verse 28 of Luke 18, "We've left our homes and followed You." You know, the implication is...what's going to happen to us? I mean, we've left everything. And Jesus said to them in verse 29, "Truly I say to you, there's no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God who shall not receive many times as much in this time and in the age to come, eternal life." You didn't leave anything that I'm not going to more than make up. And so God blessed them in this life, even though most of them were martyred, as we'll see when we look at each life, but God blessed them in this life in spite of that and will bless them in the life to come. Remarkable, remarkable men.

They are absolutely unique. They were chosen sovereignly by God. We understand that. They were chosen after a night of prayer so that they weren't people who applied for the job. They were chosen by God and Christ in that all-night communion. They were chosen to be taught, Mark 3:14, to be drawn near, to be taught intimately. And they had a short seminary career, less than two years. In less than two years, all the teaching, all the example of Christ before them, all of the short-term opportunities, all the internship was done. And during that time they had no occupation, they left their nets, they left their tax tables, they left their fields, they left everything. They carried on no business. But learning is not being idle, folks. They didn't do anything.

You know, it is interesting. Everybody around them was working and they were just walking...just following Jesus, talking to each other, talking to Him, listening to Him, talking to the people that were listening to Him. The only thing they did their whole occupation was to go from place to place to place to place to place to place with Jesus. And people, obviously, gave them a little money because Judas was the treasurer and out of that money they purchased necessary food and lodging. They appear to be idle but learning is not being idle. It was absolutely essential that be drawn near to Jesus in a time of intimacy so that He could teach them everything that they would need to know so that He could let the leash out a little bit and let them out on some short-time missions and pull them back and help them understand what was going on and react to that and continue the training till finally they would be on their own. They were first then mathetes, learners before they became apostolos, messengers. In fact, in Matthew 11:29 Jesus said, "Come and learn of Me." That's how real learning goes on. It isn't just information passed on, it's a life against a life and this is the greatest kind of learning environment there is where Jesus pulls these men in and they walk and talk with Him day and night and day and night for nearly two years. And they already had been involved with Him for perhaps nearly a year.

But I have to tell you, folks, this is not easy for Jesus to do because they were really hard-headed. There was a reason they weren't the elite academically. There's a reason they weren't at the high levels of Jewish society. They were thick headed. Jesus said to them so many times, "You just don't get it, do you? You just don't get it." What we've said to our kids and students through the years, "Can't you get this? Am I not clear? Are you not listening?" Jesus said to them things like, "Are you still without understanding?" Sometimes He said, "They don't understand any of these things." He

never...I think this is so important, Jesus never covers over their defects. If Jesus wanted to make a case for their sainthood and to get them in a stained-glass window somewhere, He might be better served if He hadn't dragged out their defects. But that's not the way it is with God. He can only use people with defects because that's the only kind there are. Anybody who tries to cover over the defects is being ridiculous. Jesus never covered the defects. In fact, the defects are thrown in our face all through the gospels. I mean, if you spend just a little while reading the gospels, you wonder of all people how the Lord could ever use Peter and all the rest are the same.

Let me tell you what some of their problems were, just quickly. They lacked spiritual understanding. That is a serious handicap in doing spiritual work. They were thick, dull, stupid and blind...and those are terms or English equivalent of terms used to describe them in the New Testament. Just don't get it. Just don't understand it. They didn't understand anything. Over and over and over and over we will read that in Matthew, in Mark, in Luke, in John.

Now how did Jesus remedy their lack of spiritual understanding? Teaching, teaching, teaching, teaching...and even after His resurrection from the grave, He stayed 40 days Acts 1 says, to teach them things pertaining to the Kingdom, 40 more days, men, of teaching.

Secondly, they not only lacked spiritual understanding, they lacked humility. They were frankly self-consumed, self-centered and self-promoting and proud. You say, "Well couldn't He have found some humble men?" Well, there aren't any. It's only...it's only pride in degrees. They spend most of their time arguing about who would be the...what?...the greatest among them. Mark chapter 9 verses 33 to 37 chronicles that, Matthew chapter 20 chronicles that, James and John have the gall to send their mother to Jesus because He was related to Jesus' mother...they thought they could play that card so they sent their mother...Please can our boys...my boys sit on your right hand in the Kingdom? And the rest of the disciples heard about it and were furious, not because they were so holy and righteous, they didn't like to see pride but because James and John might have gained something that they then would have lost. How did Jesus...how did Jesus overcome their lack of humility? By setting an example of humility to them.

Thirdly, they not only lacked understanding and humility, they lacked faith. At least four times in the gospel of Matthew He calls them "O you of little faith." That's hard to deal with. He even told them in Mark 4:40, "How is it that you have no faith?" Way into this thing, if you've read Mark you know there are 16 chapters in Mark, so when you get to chapter 16 you're getting to the whole deal, right? Okay, Mark 16:14, Jesus looks at the disciples and describes them as "In unbelief and hardness of heart." That's discouraging. That's not the beginning of the story, that's the end of it. They were tough. They lacked understanding. They lacked humility. They lacked faith.

How did Jesus try to remedy their lack of faith? By constantly doing miracles. The miracles weren't primarily for the unbelievers, they were for the disciples so that their faith could be strengthened.

Fourthly, they lacked commitment. They followed for a little while and then they kind of drifted away. As long as there were miracles all over the place, and as long as everything was going great and the crowds were there, it was fine. But as soon as the soldiers came into the garden to arrest Jesus, they were gone. They were gone. Mark 14:50 says they all forsook Him and fled...all of them. Peter winds up by a fire and on three different occasions the night of Jesus' mock trial, he denied Jesus. How did Jesus remedy their proneness to defection? I'll tell you how, by praying for them. Read John 17 where Jesus prayed and prayed and prayed for His own that they would be faithful and that the Father would bring them to heaven.

And then fifthly, they lacked power...they lacked power. There were times when they couldn't cast out demons even when they tried. They were faithless and so they couldn't harness the power that was available to them. They were weak and helpless and confronted with the enemy. What did Jesus do to remedy that? On the day of Pentecost He sent...whom?...the Holy Spirit and He said you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you.

Now you look at this group and you say...I wouldn't have picked them, I would have found another group. Who needs people with no understanding, no humility, no faith, no commitment, and no power? Just perfect candidates for God to use because then there is no human explanation for what happened, right? And that's the church. And it's still that way today...it's still that way today. He saw their weakness but He saw behind it potential to change the world. Sure the chaff was visible and lots of people couldn't see the kernel of wheat behind it, but He did. Some people would have seen nothing but a stone, a dirty brown stone, but He saw the diamond inside and He knew He could transform them. And in the end, all the glory would come to Him. So He took them as they were and He taught them and He set an example before them and He did miracles and He prayed and He gave them the Holy Spirit, and you and I today sitting here are testimony to the fact that they changed the world.

In Acts 4 the people said about them, they are ignoramuses and they are unskilled. And that's true from a worldly viewpoint. But the people also said, same passage, it was obvious they had been with Jesus. That's good, isn't it? They were ignoramuses but unskilled, but it's obvious they had been with Jesus. That should be said of us, shouldn't it? In Luke 6:40 it says a pupil is not above his teacher, but everyone after he's been fully trained will be like his teacher and people could see they were like Jesus. They had His message. They had His person. They had His power.

Well eventually they graduated from their little seminary. Jesus was gone, the Holy Spirit came. The book of Acts is launched and the rest is history. And they're still changing the world through the Scripture and the testimony which they left us. And, you know, the Lord is going to use people like that always. That's why I'm telling you, when we get through these guys, you're not only going to know them, but you're going to know for sure the Lord can use you because you're going to see

yourself here to the eternal glory of God.

Father, we thank You for what You have already shown us about these men. As we look at each of them we're going to become aware that You choose the weak and the base and the common to do mighty work and You disdain the wise and that way You receive the glory. And we're going to see ourselves in these men and we're going to find out what kind of people You use and how You can use them to change the world. We're going to find out what it means to walk with Jesus and become like Him. We pray, O God, that we might find new dimensions, new joys in our own usefulness for the same glorious purpose of the spread of the gospel. To that end we ask that Christ be glorified, in His name. Amen.

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