

Twelve Ordinary Men

May 27th, 2012

Luke 6:12-16

"¹²In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. ¹³And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."

I love the last two chapters of the Bible, Revelation 21-22. I can get very tired of living in this world, and visions like the one in that passage and in *Glorious Day* are a great balm to my soul, healing me from the disease of eternity amnesia. There's a little piece in this vision of the New Heavens and New Earth that connects us with the text we're studying this morning in Luke 6: "¹⁴And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

In the architecture of heaven, there is a monument to the twelve men mentioned in here Luke 6 (except for Judas), the men who served as Christ's apostles. It's an ongoing, eternal reminder of the huge role these men played in the great plan of God to reconcile all things to Himself. And it's a reminder that, though this text isn't the most exhilarating one you've ever read, that's it's not an insignificant matter we're exploring today.

In Luke 6 we see Jesus choosing the twelve men who would serve as His authoritative representatives in this world. Everything we know about Jesus is due to these men, and our church (and every church) is built on their ministry, which is why Paul says in Ephesians 2 that the church is God's household, "²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone." As we consider the text, I'd like to draw your attention to six principles that

help us to clarify our mission as Christ's followers, and our life together as a church, built on the foundation which these men laid.

#1: Prepare for the End

First, prepare for the end: "¹²In these days..." In which days? Verse 11 gives the context: after Jesus healed people on the Sabbath, "¹¹But they (the scribes and the Pharisees) were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus." Over the last couple of chapters we've been seeing tension mount, and hostility rise against Jesus from the religious leaders. Now it's coming to a head; they were plotting what they might do to Jesus. They were strategizing how to destroy (kill) Him (Mark 3:6).

This had been the plan from before the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8, 2 Timothy 1:9). But now Jesus is beginning to feel the heat of His own death. It's about two years away, and then He will rise from the dead, spend forty days with His disciples, and then He will ascend to the Father, and the work on earth will have to be carried on by others. So it's "in these days", as Jesus is feeling the hostility and the hatred, as He's sensing the inevitability of His execution, it's "in these days," that Jesus determines to choose some men who are going to carry on His work after He has departed.

Back in Shakespearean times there was a Latin saying that was very prominent: *Memento mori* -- remember your mortality. That mindset has largely disappeared from our culture, because our culture is far less confident about what happens after death than former days. In fact we're working hard to try to forget the reality that the end is coming for you. iPhones, iPods, iPads, may be good pieces of technology that can be used for God's glory, but they can also be great life-wasters that so absorb us at every waking minute of every day that numb and distract you from the inescapable reality of your approaching death. Is there a "Death is coming soon, live wisely" app?

Edwards (at age 19!) said, "Resolved, to think much on all occasions of my own dying, and of the common circumstances which attend death." Or Matthew Henry: "It ought to be the business of every day to prepare for our last day." Or Martin Luther: "There are two days on my calendar: today, and That Day." That's one lesson we learn here from Jesus: a day is coming when all that will really matter is how you and I lived our lives for the sake of eternity (and after death: judgment). Live today in light of "that day".

As you give thought to your lives (ministry, family, workplaces), ask yourself: do you live as though you have an inexhaustible amount of days ahead of you? How might you regret the way you've spent the last week in light of the day of your death? What might you change in the week ahead in light of the day of your death? Everyone of us is on the clock, and we're wise to consider that and live accordingly.

#2: Spiritual Leadership is *Very* Important

Second, spiritual leadership is *very* important. Here Jesus is, in light of His impending departure, appointing men to serve as His apostles. He's choosing twelve men to whom He will delegate His power and authority and message, for them to represent Him and heaven itself (Matthew 16:19) as His official ambassadors. He says, "I'm building the church on you, and the gates of hell won't prevail against it." He's choosing leaders.

And I think we get a sense of how important this is to Jesus in verse 12: "¹²In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God." This is the mystery of the incarnation -- that Jesus is fully God and fully man -- that He, the image of the invisible God, the One through whom all things were created, the One who existed from everlasting to everlasting, the One who upholds the entire universe by the word of His power, the One in whom the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, is devoting Himself to a whole night of

prayer to align His will with the Father's before selecting these twelve men. If this was Jesus' frequent practice, how essential must communion with the Father be for us?

And how important must Jesus regard leadership in the church if He would so devote Himself to prayer before this choice? We see Jesus regularly getting away for prayer and fellowship with the Father, but nowhere else are we told that He spent the whole night in prayer. But that's what He did before choosing the twelve. They are unique in church history, their teaching is the foundation on which the Church is built, and their ministry is unrepeatable. But there is still leadership in the church. We believe you all have responsibility for the selection of your leaders, and that is no small thing. Please, take that responsibility seriously, and pray for your leaders regularly.

#3: Following Jesus is about Going, Not Just Coming

Third, following Jesus is about going and telling, not just coming and seeing: "¹³And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles..." So there were a bunch of people following Jesus, sitting under His teaching, learning from Him, marveling as He performed miracles. But Jesus is moving towards something else. He's not just wanting for people to come and see, He has a plan to take twelve and send them out to go and tell, to proclaim the gospel and make disciples.

As I've said, the twelve had a unique, unrepeatable ministry, but there is still application here for us. Because the twelve were sent to make disciples, baptizing and teaching others to obey everything Jesus commanded...*including the command to go and make disciples*. So if you are a follower of Jesus, if you claim the name of Christian, please know that God has a higher vision for your Christianity than simply coming to events and receiving things, and learning. It's great to do

those things, but those things are meant to empower and equip you to go out and serve, teach, comfort, encourage, admonish others.

Following Jesus isn't only about hearing a good sermon and singing some good worship songs. It's about reordering your entire life around Jesus Christ, going out and representing Him in all of life, making Him known in word and deed, everywhere you go. How beautiful would it be to have 250 worshipers of Jesus focused not on being served, but on serving others, living with an identity of sent ones, not spiritual consumers, but ambassadors of the crucified, risen and reigning Christ?

#4: Jesus Loves to Use Ordinary, Messed Up People

Fourth, Jesus loves to use ordinary, messed up people to do extraordinary things for His Kingdom and glory. So we have Jesus, in light of His coming departure, devoting Himself to prayer as He chooses twelve to go out and be His official, authoritative representatives in the world, the twelve men who would lay the foundation of the Church, such that the gates of hell would not prevail against them. And here's who He calls:

"¹³...He called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."

Really, Jesus? These are the twelve you're going with, are you sure? If this was like the NFL Draft, I really think Mel Kuyper and the guys at ESPN are giving Jesus a hard time that He's had a terrible draft. This is not a good draft for Jesus if your aim is to change the whole world. They are profoundly ordinary: fishermen, a tax collector, a political zealot, we don't even know anything about some of them. They're nobodies. There's not a rabbi to be found on this list, not a scribe, not a priest, not a Pharisee or Sadducee.

They're not just nobodies; they're really screwed up, needy, immature nobodies! Peter's starting fights...with Jesus. They're petty, insecure, arrogant. They lack understanding, they lack faith, they lack commitment, they're a complete mess. But doesn't it draw out this deep hope and comfort that Jesus is in the business of calling people who have zero to commend themselves, who though they might have been around church for a long time, still have pockets of their lives that look hopelessly messed up? How precious, that Jesus can love them and call them and use them and empower them to go out and do amazing things, despite the fact that a lot of the time they look like bumbling morons?

How are these guys going to carry on Jesus' work in the world? But you and I are sitting here today as proof that they got it done! Or better, He got it done in and through them! "7But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us." We're clay pots, nobodies (1 Corinthians 1:26ff), so that He gets the glory: "13...when they perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus."

#5: Embrace Those who are Different from You

The twelve were very ordinary, messed up, *different* people. Jesus doesn't seem to be especially fond of affinity groups. He doesn't call twelve fishermen, or twelve tax collectors, or twelve zealots to Himself. Instead you've got at least four fishermen, a tax collector, a political rebel, some of them we don't know what they do. Some are brothers, some aren't. It's an odd cast of characters.

There had to be conflict there, right? Simon the zealot hates the Roman government, he's an anti-establishment kind of guy. Throw him together with Matthew the tax collector, the one who's betrayed his people and is getting rich working for the Romans! It's a weird team, but it's the team Jesus chooses. And one lesson from that is that in the

Body of Christ, we ought to cherish diversity: "¹¹Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all."

I got a little taste of this on Monday night. Our Life Group met and I'm looking around the dinner table at people in their 60's, people in their 20's. Singles, and widows. Married with young kids, married with kids grown and out of the house. And I looked at this group and thought, what an odd bunch of people. What would ever bring this crew around a table together? "Christ is all, and in all."

Don't cut yourself off from that kind of grace by hanging only with people who are like you. That's why we're moving away from age-specific ministry (Joyful singles, Koinonia); it doesn't seem to reflect Jesus' esteem for diversity among His family. And don't bail on things when they get rough; dig in and display the love of Christ. It's in this way that the Church becomes "the gospel made visible." "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them." Real love is love that endures, that suffers long, that seeks the good of those who annoy you and let you down and hurt you, love that perseveres when the other person isn't very lovable!

#6: Jesus Has a Plan for your Pain

Finally, Jesus has a plan for your pain. Luke's record of the twelve apostles ends on an ominous note: "¹⁶and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." Lest you think that Jesus was caught off guard by this act of treachery, and had made a mistake in choosing Judas:

"⁶⁴But there are some of you who do not believe." (For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe, and who it was who would betray him.)...⁷⁰Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the Twelve? And yet one of you is a devil."⁷¹He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the Twelve, was going to betray him."

The choice of Judas was not an accident; it was a part of God's plan for the death of His Son, and thus, for the salvation of the world. Jesus chose a wolf to be among His sheep for a season. This is a mystery. Judas was a wolf. But in the wisdom and sovereignty of God—God did not make Judas sin. He sinned of his own accord. He opened his heart to Satan. He had nobody to blame but himself. But in the wisdom and sovereignty of God, God meant it for good. Just like the story of Joseph: "²⁰You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive."

Judas' betrayal and murder of Jesus was intended for evil, and God used it for good and the saving of many lives. Most of you sitting here claim to be Christians, and have embraced that because Jesus died on the cross for your sins and rose again, your sin against God has been cancelled, and now nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. God took the worst horror and made it the greatest gift. That's how God works. Romans 8, "God works out all things for the good of those who love him, and are called according to his purpose." All things...including your greatest pain!

You try to live faithfully for Jesus, you're going to get hurt. You're going to get betrayed. You're going to pour yourself out and sacrifice and lose sleep caring for a person, caring for a couple. And then they're going to turn on you, or just forget about you. It's going to hurt. But Jesus can empathize. He has been betrayed. He has suffered. And He has shown in His own death and resurrection that He can make betrayal serve your everlasting good. As surely as Christ is risen, Jesus has a plan for your pain.

As You Go...

So, Jesus chose twelve men. It's not an extraordinary text. But in some ways, maybe it is. His wisdom and goodness and power are vividly on display in appointing these men, and using the likes of them to bring

His salvation to the ends of the earth, even here to South Jersey.
They're memorialized forever in the architecture of the New Earth.

And as much as my heart aches for that day, we're not there. As Jesus sent those twelve, He now sends out as His ambassadors, entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, imploring others to be reconciled to God, and living in such a way that our light shines before men, that they see our good deeds and praise our Father in heaven. So let's sing:

May you go in the love of your Father God

May you go in the grace of Christ

May you go in the power of the Spirit now

To bring Him glory with your life