

A General Overview of Twelve Ordinary Men, Part 1

Luke 6:14-16

Starting there in Luke 6:14, "Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."

These men listed here are nothing less than the foundation of the Church, an institution that at this time, at this moment, had not yet been revealed, and prior to the coming of Jesus Christ, it was hidden in a mystery. But they were always the sovereign plan of God, and Jesus chose them to be the foundation of this new institution called the Church. Jesus Christ taught them, not only selected them, but he taught them, trained them, deployed them. He filled them with the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit himself personally ensured the accuracy and the reliability of their ministry.

The Spirit himself guaranteed the integrity and strength of the foundation that they laid. The Spirit himself empowered them supernaturally to do what no man is able to do in his own strength. These men are an amazing provision for the church and also a necessary provision, a foundational provision because without them there is no such thing as the Church or foundation on which it would rest. It's really impossible to overstate the importance of the Apostles. But we need to remember, at the same time, that it is Jesus Christ himself who is the cornerstone of that foundation.

Without Jesus Christ there would be no foundation. He's the guiding line for all true doctrine. He's the ultimate end of all true doctrine. He is the master builder, the one who is at work to join all of us together. Not so much brick by brick; it's an organic thing going on here. He's growing us together life on life. He's joining us together to erect this holy spiritual temple in the Lord. This is where God dwells. You might think of it this way, we are where God dwells by the Holy Spirit. It's a marvelous thing.

The whole structure, though, started with these men, these twelve very ordinary, very common men. They were used mightily of God to accomplish great things, but we must never forget that at the end of the day they are just men. And the closer we look, the clearer it is that we need to look beyond them for an explanation for all that came out of them. We need to look beyond them and above them to understand their strength, their steadfastness, their integrity. And the closer we look, the more we inspect, the more we investigate, we discover the real reason they are what they are is Jesus Christ. It's the same thing with all of us.

And having said that, I do believe this general overview of these twelve ordinary men is going to be instructive for us and provide us some food for thought. This list of Apostles is just one of four lists. The lists can be found in Matthew 10 verses 2 to 4, Mark 3 verses 16 to 19, this one here in Luke 6 verses 14 to 16, and then there's another one in Acts Chapter 1, verse 13. The one in Acts, as we pointed out, is missing Judas Iscariot due to his defection and suicide.

The context of that list in Acts 1:13 is the need to replace Judas with Matthias and thus the absence of his name. But by comparing these lists, if you put them, as I did, you put them in a table, a Word document and you compare the names side by side, we found out that each list is organized into the same three groups. Each of the three groups of names has four names each, for a total of three times four is twelve, twelve names in the entire list. The names in all three of the groups are the same, even though in a couple of them one is ordered before, the other vice versa.

When Jesus entered into the inner room of Jairus' house to, to, raise his daughter from the dead in Luke 8:51, he allowed only three of his twelve Apostles to accompany him into that room: Peter, James and John. He could have chosen any of the Twelve, but he chose those three. Later on, it was those same three who were to witness something else the other Apostles would not witness. He chose Peter, James, and John, again, to accompany him. He told the other Apostles, "Truly, truly I say to you there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom." And six days later, the some standing here, were just a privileged few.

Peter, James, and John, they're the ones who were with him on the holy mountain. They're the ones who saw him transfigured before them with blazing white.

So Peter, James, and John do stand in a privileged position, even among the Twelve. All Twelve of them were privileged compared to the rest of the disciples. Obviously, Jesus' disciples were privileged compare to the rest of Judea and Jerusalem and Galilee. But these three were very close; they were relationally closer than the rest. In the lists of the twelve Apostles, they are in that closest circle. Andrew is thrown in there with them, included with them, probably dragged in as Simon Peter's brother. Knowing Peter's character, he would have done that.

But it's interesting that the first group within the Apostles, because of Andrew, they were among the first of Jesus' disciples. In fact, if you'd like, go ahead and turn there for a moment to John Chapter 1, John Chapter 1, just to see a couple of things in that chapter about the early relationship with Jesus Christ. We read in John 1:35 and following that it was Andrew who left John the Baptist. He was originally a disciple

of John the Baptist, as were some of the others, but he left John the Baptist to follow Jesus.

Verse 41 says that before he started following Jesus, "He first found his own brother Simon and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah.' And he brought him to Jesus." And even at that point, Andrew's name starts to be eclipsed behind his brother's big personality and Jesus' sovereign choice as well. Andrew brought his brother, to Simon er, his brother Simon to Jesus and Jesus took one look and said verse 42, John Chapter 1, "You are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Cephas, which means Peter or the rock." As we're soon going to find out, Jesus wasn't noticing at that moment Simon's rock-like firmness. Early on, rock is probably more what described his head, rather than his, his actual character, but Jesus here is, even at this early stage, he's speaking prophetically about what he intended to do in Simon, to take a man who really could be as unstable as water and turn him into a bedrock of apostolic foundation.

Also, there in John's Gospel, immediately after this introduction to Andrew and Simon, two of the Apostles in the innermost circle were introduced to the leader, who is the second group, that's Philip. It says in John 1:43 that the next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip. That's interesting. He found him like he was looking for him because he was. "He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.' Now Philip was from Bethsaida the city of Andrew and Peter." Here's the connection that Philip had with them. Verse 45, "Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We found him of whom Moses and the law, and also the prophets wrote Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.'"

Philip and Nathanael, Nathanael, by the way, is another name for Bartholomew. Those two names Philip and Nathanael, Philip and Bartholomew, those are in the second list. They also had an early introduction to Jesus. It's interesting how Nathanael's reply to Philip gives us an insight into his character, something that really would naturally keep him slightly more distant in a relational sense to Jesus. Look in verse 46, as John, the, the beloved Apostle, he writes in his narrative here, "Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come

out of Nazareth?" That's snarky, isn't it? "But Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'" And you could see even in those, that interaction, that interplay between these two men, something about their character and their nature. Those two, Philip and Nathanael, Philip and Bartholomew, those are in the second tier of disciples.

Then there's a third group, another group there even more remote, and except for that final name on the list, his name will live in infamy, Judas Iscariot, those other names, James son of Alpheus, Simon the Zealot, Judas son of James those men are all relatively unknown to us. There's something instructive about that in and of itself.

Let's just get a brief introduction to them, and we're going to start with Simon Peter and Andrew. As you know, these two men are brothers, sons of a, a man named John. And Jesus said even at their first meeting John 1:42, "You are Simon, son of John." Simon and Andrew were from Bethsaida on the North shore, the Northern shore of the Sea of Galilee, almost the farthest north you can get.



And by the time Jesus entered ministry, they had moved to Capernaum, probably years before, that just six miles to the west of Bethsaida. So these men grew up on the lake, very familiar with the lake and in particular with its fishing industry. When they went into business for themselves, it was a fishing business. So in Capernaum they had established themselves. They had built up a solid business, did well enough to own a couple of fishing boats. We don't know a lot about Andrew.

After those early days in ministry, we don't hear much about him anymore, but Peter we do know a lot about, don't we? Peter, he's the bold spokesman, the primary spokesman for the Apostles. He's the de facto leader of the Twelve, if for any reason, he just gets himself out in front and throws himself in front of the group at all times. Sometimes he's the hero; other times he's the dog. But that makes him an encouragement to us all, I think. Sometimes seeing parts of our own character in Peter. It's no wonder he plays prominently in the biblical text. Peter wrote two, the two epistles bearing his name, First and Second Peter. He also is the Apostle who informed the writing of

Mark's Gospel. So, if you think of Mark, think of Peter standing behind him and over his shoulder.

As I said, Simon Peter and Andrew were fishermen, and they were business partners in Capernaum with the next two men on the list, James and John. James is the older brother, which is why he's named first before John. John is the younger brother. And they are the two sons of Zebedee, a man who seems to have, have been at that time very, fairly well known. They're called the Two Sons of Zebedee often, and that speaks to some level of prominence that their father had, and his prominence extended even to, as far as Jerusalem.

If you're in John, you can flip over toward the end of that Gospel and look at Chapter 18. John 18 in verse 15, when Jesus was there in custody having been betrayed by Judas there in the beginning of the chapter, taken before this kangaroo court, this false pseudo trial, he's taken to the High Priest Annas and taken to his house. And in John 18:15 it says, "Simon Peter followed Jesus and so did another disciple." That's how John typically referred to himself throughout the Gospel that he

authored, as this unnamed disciple. Or sometimes he calls himself, the disciple whom Jesus loved.

Another interesting fact about the family of James and John is the name of their mother. The name of their mother. Her name is Salome. Salome is the sister of Mary, mother of Jesus. That puts James and John in close family relation to Jesus himself, right? They're cousins. That's interesting. Jesus kept believing family close to him. His own brothers rejected him early on, even though they came to believe later. Actually, God used them to author two books of Scripture: the book of James and the book of Jude. But his own brothers rejected him early on, and they weren't part of his close disciples or his Apostles. But these two cousins, they become part of his innermost circle of the Apostles.

James, as a figure, he was prominent among the early Apostles. He was a powerful leader, a very strong personality, but he died early. He was the first to die as a martyr. He was killed by Herod Agrippa, that's listed there in Acts 12:1-2. So he, Herod chose to make an example out of James because he was the leader of that Jerusalem church, the Jerusalem Council. When

he died, his brother John was the only one left representing that family, and he was the last of the Apostles to die.

So isn't it interesting, James and John, the first and last of the Apostles in that apostolic age.

John, he wrote the Gospel of John. He wrote the three epistles that bear his name, First, Second and Third John. And he also authored the Book of Revelation. It's interesting to see there in the beginning of the Book of Revelation that by the time that John wrote down that book, that revelation that he received from Jesus Christ, and he wrote it down, there is no hint whatsoever of the familial familiarity that existed on earth, between John and his cousin Jesus.

When the risen Lord Jesus Christ appears to John, while John is in exile on the, isle, island of Patmos, John in writing Revelation 1:17, says, "When I saw him," When I saw Him in his glorious appearance, his resurrected form, "I fell at his feet as though dead." So family connections meant nothing at that point. The only thing that existed at that point was the true

relation he had to Jesus Christ, that of Savior to saved, that of Lord and Master to slave and servant.

Another of Jesus' cousins is also among the Twelve, but before we meet him, let's look first at two more pairs of names, starting with Philip and Bartholomew, Philip and Bartholomew. As I mentioned already, Philip, he's the first name in the second group of disciples. From what we can tell, he was an eager learner. He's, he's interested, he's curious, and he often seems to struggle to understand what Jesus is, is, saying and doing at the time, but he's eager to learn. That is a great quality in a disciple, isn't it? To be teachable, to be curious, to be hungry, even if we don't get it. That makes Philip a pretty typical disciple, pretty relatable to most of us. Philip and Simon Peter's brother Andrew, they seemed to have had a good friendship, shared a friendship. We saw in John 1:43, they're both from the same hometown of Bethsaida. In that sense, Philip forms the link between the first and second groups of Apostles. He and Andrew have a, have a link, they share a hometown, and then he's the one who found Nathanael.

And Nathanael takes us into the second list. As I mentioned, Nathanael is Bartholomew. The name Bartholomew literally means son of Talomei, which either speaks to the prominence of his father, as he's known as Bartholomew-Bar and then son of Talomei. He's the one of whom Jesus said, "Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." This Bartholomew, this, this Nathanael guy, he's guileless. He's plain-speaking. He's straightforward.

The next two men in the list round out the second group of Apostles, Matthew and Thomas, Matthew and Thomas. Matthew, as we know he's the former tax collector. Among these Galileans, he would not have fit in naturally among this group. He was a collaborator with the Romans. That connected him to the political collaborators in Jerusalem, all the cronies that the Galileans hated. Here's Matthew among them. Perhaps the banquet that Matthew threw for Jesus and that inner circle, Simon and Andrew, James and John, they were all in attendance there at the time, perhaps Jesus used that as an occasion to help all of them overcome their prejudices and to receive this newcomer into their fellowship of discipleship.

We love Matthew's story, don't we? This is just, his inclusion in the Twelve is such an incredible story of grace, even more so when you consider how mightily Christ used him. Matthew was good with a pen. He was good with writing, mostly keeping ledgers and finding out who owed what, but God had another use for that pen. He, he became the tool for the authorship of the earliest Gospel, the Gospel of Matthew. The man often paired with Matthew is Thomas in the lists. He's a name, that's apparently, his name Thomas is Aramaic in origin, means twin. You may remember in John's Gospel, three times in John's Gospel, in fact, Thomas is called Didymus, Didymus, which means, the twin.

When the rejoicing disciples, when the Apostles came to Thomas and talked to him about the risen Lord, their enthusiasm is ever so slightly diminished by the response of Thomas, John 20:25, he said, "Unless I see," his hand, "in his hands the mark of the nails, unless I put my finger in the mark of the nails; place my hand into his side," not, I'm not likely to believe, he says, "I will never believe." Isn't that interesting? It's because of that response that some people, like atheists love him, he's, he's the atheists' saint, right? But some people like

those atheists like to cheer him on as the first skeptic. And that judgment is entirely wrong. It's not right at all.

Thomas is no skeptic in that comment. His remark is actually an expression of deep sadness, a disappointment in the crucifixion. We'll see that later on as we talk about his character, but he really did want to worship Jesus Christ and follow him to the very end. And when the crucifixion happened, he thought, This is the end. This is the end. He was so crushed in despair, really, it's a manifest sign of his unbelief at the moment. The fact that he became known by tradition as the Apostle who visited either Persia or India, maybe both, it's a witness to the truth of the Resurrection, that out of that deep despair and even out of that unbelief, comes great belief, great strength, for he's the Apostle to the East.

Another group of Apostles: Third Group. This is the group that's most remote, least known to us: James and Simon and Judas. James, son of Alphaeus is also known as James the Less, James the Younger, or simply you could call him little James, or little Jimmy if you like, if that's not too irreverent. But in Mark 15:40, he's called James *mikros*. *Mikros* in Greek. Micro.



He's a small one, which could mean a moniker which refers to a small stature or diminutive size, or probably more likely, just small or lesser in relation to Big James, Big Jimmy, Big Jim, the son of Zebedee. So it could refer to his prominence compared to that mighty Apostle, son of Zebedee, James, one of the Sons of Thunder, right?

The next man, Simon the Zealot, Simon the Zealot. Zealot that associates him with a political party of anti-Roman sentiment, strong anti-Roman sentiment, often violently opposed to Rome. Whether or not Simon was a card-carrying member of the Zealot party is not fully known, but it was a group, this Zealot Party, that was prone to use violence to achieve political ends.

Then there is Judas son of James. Very little is known about him, but in the other lists, he's known as Thaddaeus. In Matthew and Mark, they call him Thaddaeus, not Judas, son of James. Some of the textual variants actually refer to him not as Judas or Thaddaeus, but as Lebbeus, Lebbeus. It's likely he was actually known by three names, Judas, Thaddaeus, and Lebbeus.

One final name on the list: Judas Iscariot. He's always going to be remembered in each of the lists as the one who betrayed Jesus Christ. And we have important lessons to learn by his inclusion among the Twelve. This never took Jesus by surprise, right? He always knew who Judas was, what his nature was, what his character was. And even he knew him when he went up on the mountain in Luke 6 to pray. He knew who Judas was, what he would be like, what would happen. Yet he included him. It was part of the Father's will. We want to ask and answer the question, why?

According to John 6:71, this Judas is the son of Simon Iscariot. And that tells us that the name Iscariot refers to his origin. Iscariot is literally ish, the Hebrew word for man, plus Carioth. So ish Carioth, he is literally Judas, man of Carioth. Carioth is located about 20 miles east of the Dead Sea, which means Judas Iscariot is the only man among the Twelve who is not a Galilean. He's a Judean. There's a lot more we're going to learn about Judas Iscariot, as well as the rest of these men, as we proceed, but the note that Judas Iscariot's identity is Judean.