

A General Overview of Twelve Ordinary Men, Part 2

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 Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." We want to ask a number of questions at this point. First, why these twelve men and not others? Why select predominantly Galileans and only one Judean? Why are a third of them fishermen? Why join tax collector with political zealot? And why so many lesser-known Apostles, men who didn't seem to make a Peter or John, sized impression on the pages of Scripture? Why don't we have testimonies to their mark on history?

With Regard to that last question, we need to understand that these are twelve ordinary men, twelve regular, common men. They were nothing remarkable in and of themselves. They are nothing to be written home about, like all of us, really. And the, the less prominent among the twelve who are not known, we just know their names and know maybe a thing or two that they

said, but we don't know much in history. And yet they were used as the foundation of the church that we are now a part of.

These men, most of them, are Galileans. They're people whose region was identified by a body of water, the Sea of Galilee, rather than an ethnic and cultural identity in Judea. So these are common men. They're not wealthy. They're not well-educated, well-connected. As 1 Corinthians 1:26 puts it, among the Apostles, "Not many were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth," but do you know what they all have in common? They're believers. They're believers, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, they were all true believers, true disciples. Listen, God does not need the wealth and the wisdom of man to accomplish his perfect sovereign goals. He doesn't need the political connections of Jerusalem or the Judean elites. He doesn't need the learning of those who were educated in all the rabbinical traditions. God uses believers simply because their faith puts him on display. They put their faith in a God who moves mountains.

Let me show you something just to illustrate this. Turn back to John chapter 2, John Chapter 2, when Jesus entered Jerusalem for the first time early on in his ministry. Do you

remember what happened there? John Chapter 2, you look at verse 13, we'll start there, take a look, one, one of Jesus' first acts in his Messianic role. As he came in as the Jews' Messiah, his very first act was to clean up his father's house because it had fallen into the hands of the corrupt.

Look at John 2:13. "The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. And he told those who sold the pigeons, 'Take these things away; do not make my father's house a house of trade.' His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for your house will consume me.'"

What's evident from that account, early on in Jesus' ministry, there were two temple clearings, one at the beginning, this one and then one at the end, but what's evident from this account is that the, the spiritual leadership of the Jews has been and still remained utterly and totally corrupt. Jesus knew the eventual outcome because their reaction to his housecleaning here foreshadowed their ultimate rejection of him. Look at verse

18, "The Jews said to him, 'What sign do you show us for doing these things?'" Look how non-self-reflective they are. "'What sign do you show us for doing these things?'" Like, we're the authorities, we're in charge, who do you think... He had just driven everybody out. That's power!

They've got the audacity to question him here. "What sign do you show us?" "Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, three days I will raise it up.'" Do you know what that points to? Crucifixion. "The Jews then said," mockingly, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?' But he was speaking about the temple of his body. And when therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed." They were believers. God could do much with believers. They believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken, verse 23, "When he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man."

Interesting phrase, isn't it? "He himself knew what was in man." The very next verse, look at it there. John 3:1, "Now

there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews." He's a member of the Sanhedrin. He's a scholar. He's the teacher of Israel. And although he seemed to be sympathetic and friendly in this meeting, even respectful and somewhat admiring, remember he, Jesus, is 30 when he enters ministry; Nicodemus is probably in his 60's or 70's. He's a man half his age he is speaking to, thought he was respectful. Jesus identified him, though, as one who rejected his testimony. Jesus identified the fundamental problem with Nicodemus from his very first reply in John 3:3, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot," that is, not able to, "see the kingdom of God." That's why in verse 10 Nicodemus does not understand these things. That's why in verse 11 Nicodemus does not receive Jesus' words. He's unregenerate. He's, he's not born again. He does not believe.

And by contrast, let's turn over to Matthew's Gospel, Matthew 16 and look at verse 13. Matthew 16:13, and let's see the contrast there between the spiritual leadership of Jerusalem represented in this man Nicodemus and then some simple believers, the ones whom Jesus had chosen. When Jesus asked the Apostles in Matthew 16:15, "Who do you say that I am?" they were spot-on in their answer. They were theologically spot-on. Look at verse 13, Matthew 16, "Now when Jesus came into the district

of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist," who, by the way, earlier had been beheaded, so he's no longer around; they think he's an incarnation, a re-introduction of John the Baptist, "others say Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.'" Do you know what all that indicates? Blindness. Spiritual blindness. Verse 15, "He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah," son of Jonah, son of John, "For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'" "

Now, if Peter had stopped talking at that point, said no more on that occasion, that would have been great, perfect. Once again, he stuck his foot in his mouth by rebuking the one he had just identified as the Christ, the Son of the living God; another indication of his struggle to restrain his own impetuous nature. But before Jesus rebuked Peter as a mouthpiece of Satan himself, he commended him as a true believer. That was what Peter was, foibles and all; weaknesses, character flaws and all. His confession, the confession of all the Apostles, was evidence of the supernatural working of his father in heaven. They truly

belong to the father and so they truly belong to Jesus Christ, too.

The selection of these twelve ordinary men, these Galileans, these non-scholars, these non-wealthy, not of noble birth, Galilean men, they're an indication of God's rejection of Israel's current spiritual leadership. They're yet another indictment on Israel's shepherds. They are the revelation of God's will and intention to start over with a bunch of nobodies. Keep in mind, this appointment of the Twelve comes right after the Sabbath controversies in Luke 5 and 6. Remember, Jesus did the unthinkable in the judgment of Israel's Sabbath Day watchdogs, anyway. He did the unthinkable, he actually had the audacity to heal a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath Day. It wasn't a life-threatening issue, but it was an issue of mercy. Remember how the scribes and Pharisees responded? Luke 6:11, "They were filled with fury." How could you be filled with fury at an act of compassion? But they were. It revealed their unregenerate state. "And they discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus."

So the growing hostility, this opposition of Israel's leadership against Jesus, their heart rejection of their own Messiah, that's early on evidence of Jesus. And as he sought the

will of his father on that occasion, Luke 6, the father guided him in the selection of twelve Apostles and God set aside the establishment leadership to establish a new leadership. Why twelve men, not another number? Because, again, this ties to the indictment of spiritual, of Israel's spiritual leadership. Jesus told them in Luke 22:29 to 30, "I assign to you, as my father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on the thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Wow. From Galilean fishermen, from tax collectors, from murderous plotting zealots, and a whole bunch of nobodies lifted up to judge the twelve tribes of Israel in the millennial kingdom. Isn't that fascinating?

Why these twelve men in particular? Why these names and not others? Well, they're nothing resembling the current leadership of Israel, nothing at all. And that's what commends them to God. Rather, they represent the constitution of the new people of God. Back to what I briefly referred to earlier in 1 Corinthians 1:26 and following, "For consider it your calling, brethren." This is all of us. We're all included in this, right? "Consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God," he, "chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame



the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are," Why? "So that no human being might boast in the presence of God."

In God's economy, there's a sense in which the less we are in the world, the greater we are in his sight. The more bypassed and overlooked we are in the world's sight, the more he'll make himself known through our life and our testimony. It's not that we just sit back and do nothing. We work hard. We work really hard. We study. We practice. We, we give ourselves, our time, our energy. We're sacrificial. Sometimes it absolutely drains us. But at the end of the day, it's nothing that the world would count or care about. It's what God uses, though. These twelve men represent divine judgment on the religious establishment there in Jerusalem, the wealth, the power, the intellectual achievements of men, the political influence. God set aside all of that, all the Jewish leadership with all its spiritual bankruptcy, its rank hypocrisy, which quite frankly was fouling the land. He bypassed all the wise and the noble, and he elevated this group of nobodies. But these nobodies they're truly somebodies because God had blessed them with the gift of faith. And now, they're the ones who represent the true



constitution of this new assembly made up of the true people of God.

There are other observations, lessons we can make as well. Let me be brief and just mention really one, cause we've already mentioned there are striking points of amazing diversity in this band of twelve Apostles. Four fishermen, no superior education, no social connections or family wealth. There's a tax collector who hovers near the bottom rung of the social ladder because of his collaboration with the Romans; he's hated by his own people. Also joined to their number is this political zealot, a man who's eager to see all Roman collaborators, including Matthew, dead. God's got a real sense of humor, doesn't he, in the church bringing us all together in the diversity as this band of Apostles. There's also just such a diversity of personality. You see the impulsive Peter, the pensive John; you see the pessimistic Thomas, the optimistic Andrew. You've got James the strong leader; Philip, the careful, maybe thoughtful scholar. A wide array of personality types.

What lesson do we learn from that diversity, which is so evident in this group of men who formed the foundation of the church? Well, first, God intends the church to glorify Christ by its manifold diversity. As you see, like in a cut diamond, the

more, the more angles on that diamond, the more it displays the light, same thing with his people. God ransomed for himself through Jesus Christ, Revelation 5:9, a people from “every tribe and language and people and nation.” That’s for purpose. And in each local church, we have young and old and rich and poor, married and unmarried, strong and weak. The church by its very constitution, look, frankly, let’s admit it, we’re all people who would not be hanging out together if it weren’t for the church, if it weren’t for salvation, would we? Jesus chose these first Apostles, and in their diversity, he demonstrate that the church is also equally diverse, manifesting the full-orbed, wide-arrayed glory of God.

The second thing here we see is the unity, that he produces in us. In all this diversity, he produces this unity, and it shows his intention to demonstrate his great wisdom. His great wisdom comes across by bringing unity out of diversity. How in the world do you bring all this together? You look at any worldly organization, European union, or anything you want to look at and you see how they try to bring unity out of diversity all the time. They cannot join the two together. It’s like the Roman Empire and the statue in Daniel’s prophecy, it’s got, it’s iron, but then it’s got feet of iron and clay, right. Because iron and clay don’t mix together. It’s brittle with strength,

they're never going to mix, they're never going to come together, there's never going to be true unity, there's going to be a false unity when the Anti-Christ comes and sets up a false unity, but that's going to be demolished when that stone comes rolling, knocks that statue into pieces.

It grows into a mountain, a mountain, a unified mountain made up of diverse people like you and like me. That's something that's utterly impossible for man: true unity from the core all the way to the surface. It's only possible through the Spirit of God. That's the truth of 1 Corinthians 12:4 to 6. "Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; varieties of activities, but it the same God who empowers them all in everyone." A church by its diversity brings glory to God because its unity demonstrates the unifying presence and power and wisdom of God. It's unexplainable otherwise.

You might add a third lesson. We observe in the diversity of the Apostles that we can look to what Christ accomplished in them, because of his almighty power, we can find reason for hope. We have hope because he is powerful. There is no hope in man, but in Jesus Christ, we find every reason for hope. He's the one who explains these men, their faithfulness, their

integrity, their fruitfulness, their perseverance to the end. It says in Acts 4:13 that the leaders in the Sanhedrin, when they questioned these guys, "When they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished." There's no human explanation for this, but "they recognized they had been with Jesus."

We only need to look at one man, Simon, to see that Jesus is the one who turned Simon into Peter, from an impulsive, unreliable mess into a foundation rock for the entire Church. Jesus is the one who made him rock-like. It had to be, because on his own, Simon was weak and vacillating, but this guy endured to the very end. He died the good testimony of a martyr, and when he was, crucified upside down. The Apostles are the foundation of the Church. They point to the true constitution of the Church. Its diversity serves to put the manifold glory of Jesus Christ on display. The unity it displays through diversity reveals his wisdom and also his power, and all of that just gives us hope.

Revelation of the glory of God in the Church is that by his Spirit, he's unified his people in himself, and it starts with men just like this, people like you and me, just regular folks. Jesus made them the enduring foundation of an enduring church, a

church that sprouted disciples all over the world, all of them demonstrating the same marks of regeneration and belief and unity.

Well, with those general introductions to the Apostles and having made some general observations, noted some general lessons, I want to close with some general cautions, okay? Some cautions that will help set us up, not just the study, the character studies of the Apostles, but, but also for all biblical study. All biblical study is going to be included in these cautions and so I want to give you just two general cautions as we study these Apostles. First caution, be careful in reading history, and second, be quick to apply what you learn from history and these guys to yourself first. Okay? Be careful in reading, and secondly, be quick to apply.

So first, be careful. As you read this history, as you read about the Apostles, be careful that you don't commit the error of assuming you understand them too quickly. As American evangelicals, so much of what's popular on our shelves today and our bookstores and online and all that, is that which attempts to make these stories more familiar to us in our time. It reminds me, when I was growing up as a little kid, I saw those maps in school. You ever see those maps and it has the

continents of the Western Hemisphere, North and South America smack in the middle of the map. And it takes the rest of the world, which is more prominent in land mass, and it divides it, puts it on either side of the edges. That's what we call self-centered, right? I mean we've got ourselves in the middle and similarly, I mean, why not, right? I mean America's the greatest country on God's green earth, right? But similarly, we've come to think and read history in much the same way. We read the Bible in the same way.

We read history and Scripture as if our own time was at the epicenter of history, rather than recognizing that Jesus Christ is the epicenter of all human history and that makes what happened in his time and his culture very, very important. So we want to make sure that rather than making their time and their culture and everything conform to our time and our culture, rather than reading their culture through the lens of our culture, we need to be careful to go back into their world. And that means we have to allow that story on the pages of Scripture to be as unfamiliar as it actually is and let that unfamiliarity make us somewhat uncomfortable.

So when we slow down long enough to understand these Apostles along with all their cultural prejudices and hang-ups

and even the things about them that make us uncomfortable, we need to turn and then apply that to ourselves in a rebuking and a corrective way. Where do we find evidence of those ugly things in ourselves? Look, that's how this study, as we pursue some character sketches of the Twelve, and how this is going to become most useful to us. This is what we need to do. We need to be careful to read the story carefully, make proper observations, and then we need to turn and put the crosshairs on our own lives and hearts first. That's how this is going to be instructive. And we'll understand these men as men of their times. We're going to see how they are and are not like us. We're going to see how their lives are both a confrontation with ourselves and then at the end of the day, also a great encouragement for us and a source of hope.