

The Twelve: Solidifying the Rock, Part 3

Luke 6:14

Luke 6:12 to 16 goes like this, "In these days he," that is Jesus, "went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named Apostles: 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."

We are going to become more acquainted with these men over the next several weeks because they are the key characters in the story of the Gospel. And they are the immediate recipients of Jesus' teaching. It's helpful for us to get a character sketch of these men so we can sort of keep them in our minds' eye as we go through the Scripture. These Apostles are set forth in Scripture as examples to us. They are encouragements to us, but not so we can ever say, hey, if a guy like Peter can make

it, I can make it, too. That is not the point here. That would be missing the point entirely if we're to look at them and say, boy, they're just as human as I am and if they can do it, I can find it within myself to do it, as well. They are there in the text so that we can see not their ability, but Christ's power to change our lives. That is the point. It's God "who is able to do exceeding, abundantly beyond all that we ask or think," right? Ephesians Chapter 3, "According to his power that works within us."

Why is that? Why is it that the focus of the Scripture is entirely on God and his power and his action and always on our weakness? Is it to make us feel low? Um, yeah. It is. It's to put us, actually, in our proper place because in sin, our natural tendency is to elevate ourselves as if we're something, as if we're important. What we need to see is that we are important in as much as God has created us in his own image, in as much as a God has sent his Son to die on the cross for us, for our sins. That's what makes us important, because God says we're important. But really, the point of all of Scripture is that God is central and his purposes and his plans and his glory is everything. What's important in Scripture is Jesus Christ.

Why is it that we see in these men, weak men, not, not strong in and of themselves, common, normal, everyday men like us? Why do we see them in all their humanness? Why do we see Christ in his power working within? Because we need to see that to God will be the glory in the church. To God will, "be the glory in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen," Ephesians 3.

So this list of Apostles that we just read, they are believers in Jesus Christ. God has done a remarkable work in them, but they in and of themselves are nothing special. We need to see that. That is actually what's part of what offended the scribes and the Pharisees, that Jesus did not come to their seminaries and try to cherry-pick and recruit their best men for his purposes. His glory was not to be made manifest in the glory of men. His glory was to be made manifest in average men, residents of Galilee, not Judea; fishermen, not scholars; some of them even on the margins of society, like a, like a tax collector and a political radical.

The rest of these men that are named there in that list, they're notable, mostly, for their plainness, the fact that they're not notable. They're notable for their ordinariness, but it's through them that Jesus Christ has changed the entire

world. By Christ's power working through these men, the course of human history continues in its God-determined direction. By Christ's power working through these men, the lines of the map have been drawn. Even the global scourge of Islam has arisen as a reaction against and as an antithesis to the Christian witness, as set forth by these men.

So this is, these are incredible things we're reading here about God's power to take ordinary men and do the absolute extraordinary, to take men with whom nothing is possible and do what's absolutely impossible. That's the point. Incredible world-changing, history-determining, map-drawing power. That is the power of Jesus Christ.

Now, we've started our survey of the twelve with Simon Peter, of course. Who else would we start with? He wouldn't allow us to start with anybody else because he's always jumping in front, right? He has that kind of personality that sort of thrusts itself front and center, demanding our attention whether you like it or not. That's Peter. But again, it's not because Peter is so remarkable, that in and of himself that he's prominent. The fact that he's prominent, the fact that he is put into this place not just by the Gospel writers, but by Jesus himself. The fact that he's put there is because he's so common,

because he's so relatable to us. I believe that God chose Peter to occupy such a prominent position among the Apostles because we all know a Peter, and also because there is a bit of Peter, in every single one of us, truth be told.

We often find Peter speaking up for the other men simply because he's impetuous enough to say what he thinks. They're all thinking the same thing; he's just the one saying it. He's just the one verbalizing it. In that sense, he's sort of the de facto leader among them because he's always stumbling into the front and everybody else is catching up. And that's by God's good design because as Peter speaks out, we find him speaking for us, too. We find him asking the questions that are really on our minds, as well. In Peter, we hear the honest, transparent expressions from the heart of every typical believer. In that sense, Peter is every man. Peter is like an average Joe, and because of God's work in his life, we see the kind of transforming grace that isn't just operative in Peter, but in every single Christian. That is what makes him such a source of encouragement to us. It's not because he's so amazing, but because he's so common. God's grace working in Peter, who is a typically weak and impulsive and even vacillating man, to transform him into the steadfast rock. That is what is amazing and that's what gives us hope.

Now, Peter represents every true believer. He's grounded in faith. He is instructed in hope, and he is serving the Savior in love. In our first point that we covered last time examined the first of that triad of Christian virtues: faith, hope and love. As Simon Peter followed Christ by faith, that initial faith, which was weak at first, like a small seed, it grew and it produced fruit. It strengthened over time, it was like, in his life, it was like the curing of concrete into a sturdy foundation.

We started into a second point last time, which we're gonna look at in more detail right now. In hope, Peter learned from Jesus Christ. In hope, Peter learned from Jesus Christ. He had a lot to learn, a lot to understand and the longer Peter followed Jesus by faith, the more he learned, the more he found out that all his hope is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Jesus was pleased to bring Peter close to him, nearer in intimacy and fellowship, closer in friendship, deeper in relationship. All of Jesus' disciples, you understand, were privileged to be in his presence, to be following him, to be learning from him, hearing his teaching, seeing all of his wisdom, his power on display. But the special privilege belonged to his twelve Apostles.

On one occasion, Jesus told the twelve, Matthew 13, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear." Many times Jesus pulled those twelve men away. He taught them things that the crowd would never ever hear. They were an incredibly privileged group of men. But even within those twelve, there was this even more intimate group among the twelve, those whom Jesus chose for even more special privilege. There were certain occasions when Jesus singled out the, the big three, Peter, James, and John, and he called them into private fellowship and gave them privileged instruction. He exposed them to even more intimate displays of his power, which the rest of his disciples didn't see, but only heard from their witness. There's a passage I wanted to show you, which illustrates the level of privilege Peter enjoyed, such special intimate access to Jesus. And all for a purpose: so that Peter would learn these hope-inspiring lessons and then all of this would be transmitted to you and me now.

Here's the first lesson. You can write this down, a little sub-point. The first lesson that Peter learned is listen to Jesus Christ and to him alone; heed Jesus' word and his alone. Listen to him. And to see that, I'd like to show you in Luke Chapter 9. So go ahead and turn to Luke Chapter 9. We read last time the healing of Jairus' daughter in Luke 8, but in Luke

Chapter 9, we read about this remarkable experience as Peter is an eye-witness to the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. It's an amazing moment. In context, Jesus has just drawn out of Peter the Good Confession at Caesarea Philippi, Matthew 16:16. "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Luke summarizes Peter's confession there in verse 20 as "You are the Christ of God," and that's where we're going to enter the scene. Look at Luke 9:21 and follow along as I read. Jesus, after Peter made this good confession, Jesus "strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, saying, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.' And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it. For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses or forfeits himself? For whoever is ashamed of me and my words, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. But I tell you truly, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God.'"



Stop there for a second. You've got the scene, right? Jesus has separated his twelve Apostles from the crowds and took them to Caesarea Philippi. He's extracted from them through Peter the confession about his true identity and right after that, rather than promising his disciples a, an unbroken, unabated pathway to the splendor and joy of Messianic glory, Jesus strikes a rather ominous note of warning. Suffering is coming. First, for the Son of Man, the one you follow and then secondly, additionally, suffering for all those who follow him. Suffering is the route to glory. There is a cross before the crown.

Luke skips the part where Peter took Jesus aside and rebuked him for talking about suffering. We read about that in Matthew. But Luke doesn't waste any time here. He wants us, as we read this, to see the connection between suffering and glory, that standing with Jesus Christ, whether it's in the classroom, whether it's in the workplace, whether it's in your neighborhood, whether it's with your family, whoever it is, standing with Jesus Christ, not denying him, not denying his words, but standing fast with him, it's all worth it. That's what Luke wants us to see.

Look at verse 28, as Jesus provides his inner circle with a, a special preview into the coming glory, the resurrection

glory, it says, "Now about eight days after these sayings," Jesus, "took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray and as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered, and his clothing became dazzling white. And behold, two men were walking with him, Moses and Elijah." Why Moses and Elijah, by the way? What does Moses represent? The law, right? What about Elijah? What does he represent? The prophets, right? Those two Old Testament figures are there together with Jesus and they portray the intent of all Old Testament Scripture. What is it? To point to Christ. That's what Moses and Elijah are doing there on the Mount of Transfiguration and that's what Jesus, particularly wanted Peter, John, and James to see.

Let's keep reading. "Behold, two men were talking with him, Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory and spoke of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." Isn't that interesting how it puts Jesus' crucifixion not as a passive thing there, but as something he will accomplish. Fascinating, isn't it? "Peter and those who were with him," verse 32, they "were heavy with sleep." I think this, you wonder how in the world could they sleep at a time like this? But I think they were just so overcome physically with the sight that they saw

and the spiritual reality, that they were just overwhelmed. It just exhausted them.

So they're "heavy with sleep, but when they became fully awake," like, get up, guys! "they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. And as the men were parting from him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is good that we are here. Let us make three tents, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah'—not knowing what he said." Of course he didn't know what he said. He didn't know what he was talking about, but that never stopped Peter, right? He just opened his mouth and let it flow. But look, can you blame him? Once again, we're like this. We are so like this. And if you don't say it like Peter, you're thinking it. You're thinking the same thing. He's saying here, look, this is awesome. This is incredible. Let's, Let's stick around for a while and maybe we'll celebrate the true Feast of Booths. Let's make some tents, camp out.

Which one of you, which one of us, wouldn't think that's a good idea? I, for one, would love to stay there and worship and fellowship and ask, I mean, I've got a lot of questions. Moses, tell me about... I have so many questions. Elijah, what was the chariot ride like, man, when you went off in the heavens, never were buried or anything? We get it, Peter, we're with you.

Again, there he is right out in front. He's speaking what's on his mind. He's speaking before the others had a chance to speak. But again, he's verbalizing what they're all thinking.

Notice what happens next, no doubt in response to what Peter said in that moment. In fact, all three synoptic Gospels record this scene in exactly the same way. The transfiguration happens; there's Moses and Elijah. Peter speaks and then immediately a voice from heaven answers. And the whole thing is intended to teach us something very, very important. "As," verse 34, "As he was saying these things, a cloud came and overshadowed them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. And a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is my son, my Chosen One; listen to him!' And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and told no one in those days anything of what they had seen."

Literally, that phrase in the Greek, it's: To him, listen. This is emphatic. The one to whom Peter is to listen, and to heed, and to pay attention to, it's this one, who is placed in the emphatic position grammatically. It's indicating the exclusiveness, the absoluteness, the uniqueness of the authority of God's beloved son, God's chosen one. So the Old Testament, the law, the Psalms, the Prophets, they all serve their purpose

when they point to the one and only Son of God, Jesus Christ. So for you and me, beloved, just like Peter, James, and John, it's to him we're to listen. It's to him we're to give heed to, to pay attention to. Beloved, this is such an important lesson Peter learned and one that we all need to learn, as well.

Let's just ask a few questions of self-reflection and self-confrontation. Is Jesus Christ the singular object of all your affection? Is he beloved to you? Is he the object of all your devotion, your time, your worship? Does his will command your full and unqualified, unhesitating obedience? Do you study his words? Do you reflect on his teaching that you might demonstrate your love and gratitude to him through obedience to his will? Paul wrote, 2 Corinthians 5:9, that "whether we're at home or we're away, we make it our aim to please him." We are to, Ephesians Chapter 5, "we're to walk as children as light" and we're to "try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord." That's the joy of every believing heart, to worship and serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

Take an inventory sometime of your checkbook or however you record your expenditures. Take an inventory sometime of your week, how much time you're devoted to work or probably more for your sake, your play, your entertainment. Take an inventory.

Just write it out in a week's time and see if your time and attention given to work and play, even family, can become so much more important than devotion to the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. What's occupying your time and attention?

Listen, turn off the media. Power down your smart phones. Unplug yourself from the internet. Stop trying to find pleasure in the pursuit of worldly amusements and activities. Open your Bibles. Read and study your Savior. And then get up and go out and do what he has said to do. Believe God that true joy is found in worshipping and obeying the Lord Jesus Christ. Beloved, that's what you and I were saved for. The Gospel is the beginning. It's the commencement of a relationship to God. Once the sin is taken away in the cross, we are now on good standing with our God. We are children of our father, and we delight to do his will just as Jesus delighted to do his will. Is that your heart? Is that your pleasure? Is that your joy?

Look, if you know the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, there is no other answer. Deep down inside, even if you don't do it perfectly, like Peter, even if you don't do it perfectly, you know that is the true answer of every believer. It's your heart. So be radical in obeying him. Be radical in giving your time and attention and all your resources and all your energy and all

your passion and devotion to him and him alone. Don't let anything separate you from what you're saved for. You're saved for relationship to the Father through Jesus Christ. Do not shortchange that. Do not sell yourself short. You're a child of the King.