

The Twelve

In these modern days with all of our great world and business leaders, we marvel at the way men and their enterprises can become so very successful in just a short period of time. And invariably, it seems that the key element involved in their success is that they surrounded themselves with bright and talented people, people who are able to quickly capture the vision of their leader and then carry forward that vision to success.

Here, in these scriptures we see how Jesus did a similar thing. He began the most successful and most important enterprise that mankind would ever witness. But He did it with one very important exception to the average successful business model. Here, Jesus did not depend upon the personal abilities of those that He chose, but rather, He instead personally equipped each of them with everything they would ever need to succeed in their calling. He gave them personal instruction, and he gave them the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit to enable them to carry out His plans.

Listen to these words, from Luke chapter 6, beginning with verse 12.

¹²Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. ¹³And when it was day, He called His disciples to *Himself*; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles: ¹⁴Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew; ¹⁵Matthew and Thomas; James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot; ¹⁶Judas *the son* of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor. (Luke 6:12-16)

Each week, as we read these accounts that took place in the life of the Lord Jesus, I want us to always remind ourselves that God's purposes in giving these words to us are always many fold. Yes, these are actual historical accounts of the things that Jesus and His disciples did in their day. But they are at the same time, instructions in righteousness, specifically intended for you and me and for our special benefit in this our day.

Folks, God's truths and His promises, especially His promises regarding salvation are timeless. The Apostle Peter, in his words of 1 Peter 1, spoke of how the prophets of old knew about and prophesied about this man, the Lord Jesus, long before He came to walk among us, bringing with Him the long-awaited salvation that our souls so desperately needed.

Listen to these words in 1 Peter chapter 1, beginning in verse 10.

¹⁰Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, ¹¹searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹²To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into.

¹³Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; ¹⁴as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; ¹⁵but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:10-18)

Here, the Apostle Peter is saying that as Isaiah and the other prophets wrote about Jesus, many hundreds, even thousands of years before His birth, their purpose was to speak these words ahead to the disciples then, and then also to speak them ahead to you and me now as we read and study them today.

And our response should be to search these truths out further for ourselves so that not only we can benefit, but also that many others can benefit from our witness and from the message that we ourselves will speak forward into the hearts of anyone who will listen.

Here as we read that Jesus went into the mountains and prayed all night and then, that He carefully chose twelve disciples from among perhaps as many as several hundred men. In these simple words, the Holy Spirit is revealing some very special mysteries and truths that we ought to wonder about, mysteries like why Jesus, the omnipotent God who created the heavens and the earth still needed to pray all night, seeking the will, the plans, the directions of God the Father, before He moved forward with His decision about choosing the twelve disciples.

I believe that this simple revelation is precious beyond measure. Yes, Jesus was the omnipotent God who created the heavens and the earth, and even created the very ground that He was walking on. But this simple act of humility,

the humbling of His heart, soul and Spirit before His Heavenly Father bespeaks how Jesus had graciously laid aside His glory, His majesty, and most all of His omnipotent power to obediently come and die on the cross so that you and I might be saved from our sins.

Folks, Jesus' simple act of humble obedience to God the Father should demand no less of our own souls. If He, the omnipotent God would lay aside all that He was, then so should you and I.

Recall the words of the Lord Jesus to the Rich young ruler when asked what he should do to have eternal life. There, Jesus said to the young man that he should go and sell all that he owned, give what he received to the poor, and then come and follow Him. Folks, that was exactly what Jesus did with God the Father. With great humility, Jesus gave up all of His own majesty and power and glory and came to serve the plans of God the Father.

And that is exactly what is required of you and me, and no less. We cannot hang onto our self and our self-interests and expect God the Father to accept our meager handouts of the time and energies we might have left over. That will not work. He requires every ounce of surrender and commitment within our souls.

And clearly, in revealing to us the careful manner with which Jesus went about this very important decision is intended as a "teaching moment" for you and me. And we must be careful to learn from it.

In a special verse that we have quoted on several occasions recently, Matthew 11:28, Jesus tells us what is required of us. There, we read,

²⁸Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Jesus was meek and lowly in heart. And from these words, we know that He was humble and contrite as He prayed there all night with His Father. And that is what He requires of you and me.

And I must believe that humility was one of the reasons why Jesus chose the twelve men that He chose. He saw in them the humble desire to give up their "self-needs and self-desires", to give up all that they held dear, and then to follow Him wherever He would lead them.

Jesus' choice of these twelve men had nothing to do with their education, their training, or their standing in the community.

None of the usual human rationale applied. It had everything to do with the Spirit. God's Spirit knows the hearts of men and God's Spirit made a solemn choice of these men, and the Trinity agreed and said Yea and Amen.

And I am personally convinced that even as God had woven the fibers of each of these men's souls together in their mother's womb, He also wove "humility" and everything else they would need to be the special disciples that Jesus would want them to be.

Also, another precious "instruction in righteousness" that we glean from this short message of truth is the manner in which Jesus went about seeking God's direction and guidance. He got alone with God the Father and prayed all night.

This was a very serious matter, one that would impact the world for eternity. And such decisions should not be entered into quickly or lightly.

And the same should be true for you and me. When we are to make serious choices and decisions, we too should go away to a private place and commune and inquire of God. And not for just a quick moment, as we most often do, but for a long time, so that God can have enough time to speak back to us.

God wants to "reason" with you and me on matters. He tells us so with words like those found in Isaiah 1, where He tells us to

¹⁸ "Come now, and let us reason together," says the Lord. (Isaiah 1:18)

The Lord Jesus and God the Father reasoned together that whole night. And then, as day broke through, the decisions were made, and Jesus got about the business at hand.

These particular words of scripture were especially significant to me as I worked within the ministry there at French Camp. Regularly, I was called upon to be a part of choosing men and women to be a part of our "ministry team". And those choices were ever so important because we were actually doing as Jesus did that day. We were choosing people who would be part of Jesus' "ministry team" to those kids.

So often, we get too caught up in considering “technical qualifications” and “human talents”, and we lose sight of some of the most important attributes of men and women’s souls.

We can imagine that even as a great leader like Billy Graham chose his original ministry team, He probably based some of his choices on obvious talent needs, Beverly Shea could sing, Cliff Barrows could lead music, others could do financial matters, and on and on. . . . And those men have proven to be excellent choices.

But folks, as I look back on all my many decisions, I confess that in my human reasoning, I probably looked too often at the “outside”, at the human talents and personalities of a person and not at the “inside” where the “real qualifications” were.

Let me strongly proclaim to you that Jesus did not do that with these twelve men. Yes, we will later on see these men’s personalities and some of their talents, but their personalities and their talents were only incidental to Jesus’ choosing of them.

Jesus did not need to choose “ready-equipped” people for the work of His ministry. He would equip them Himself. He would teach them, and He would impute all of the qualifications and “Gifts of the Spirit” and “Spiritual Fruits” of righteousness that would be necessary for the carrying out of His plans and His purposes.

The things that Jesus would ask of His disciples and the things that He will ask of you and me are things of the Spirit and not of the man or woman. So, in that sense, our earthly talents and personalities are not necessary to the carrying out of His plan. His gifts, His fruits and His personality are all that is required.

The rule that seems consistent throughout these scriptures is that “those whom God calls to a purpose, He equips for that purpose”. God can take a small boy with a rock and a sling and He can slay a giant. God can take another small boy with a few loaves of bread and fishes and feed 5000 people.

God can enable three men to walk through a fiery furnace without being burned. God can enable a man to sleep comfortably with hungry lions and not be harmed. God can enable an evangelist to preach the gospel to millions and millions of people across the globe.

In Peter, Andrew, James and John, Jesus picked fishermen. In Matthew, He picked a tax collector. In the Old Testament, God chose men who tended sheep, Abraham, Moses and David, all of which would become some of the greatest leaders the world will have ever known.

Yes, God may, in His providence, prompt a person to get some training early in their lives that will be used in a later calling, as he did with me, but that is not always so.

Again, the simple truth is, God does not depend upon our own personal talents. He uses other criterion in making His choices of men and women to carry His mission on forward. And in making His own choices, the enabling, the teaching, the knowledge, the wisdom, the power that a person needs will be provided by God Himself, when and as each person needs it.

A question, "Do the things that I am saying preclude our need to reach out and receive further training, such as Bible College and Seminary training? Not at all! God will lead each of us in our preparation and equipping.

But the point that is being demonstrated here is that no previous human talents or education or personality traits are really required before a person can be chosen by God to carry His plan on forward.

It seems that all that He asks of us is that we have a willing and surrendered heart. With those simple qualifications, He can make us into His servants, His disciples, His preachers, and His messengers of the gospel.

Lastly, may I point out another, very strongly evident truth that is being revealed here within these words. "Jesus chose these men." They did not choose Him. He said those exact words in John chapter 15. Listen! Jesus said,

¹⁶ You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. (John 15:16)

Folks, yes, there are many "free will" decisions made along the way within our relationship with the Lord Jesus. But in matters such as these, there was no "free will" mentioned within this choice made by the Lord Jesus.

Some might argue, "but any or all of those twelve men could have refused Jesus and turned away from Him". But that is not at all in evidence here. These men were chosen specifically by God, and the choice was completely in God's hands, and so were these men's responses.

Yes, later on, from time to time the disciples would stumble in their faithfulness. And yes, Judas would deny Jesus and betray Him. But the scriptures are clear that Judas' denial and betrayal were a very integral part of God's plan from the very beginning.

Folks, too often, we want to narrowly define God's involvement and God's influence in the matters of our lives. But we should not do that. God really is "Sovereign". And He exercises His sovereignty at every moment of every day. And He has abilities and power far beyond our comprehension. And He can foreordain choices to be made and matters to take place irrespective of your or my free will, but while at the same time, mysteriously allowing our free will to be fully involved.

And because of the generous provision of faith that God has put within my soul, I have no problem with accepting that God does such things, and even does them often, and also in allowing Him to especially do those things in my own personal life.

Again, this is a very important truth for us to accept. Those disciples were foreordained and chosen to be God's special Apostles, men who would be sent out to preach the Gospel of Christ and to establish His church. And the gates of hell would not prevail against them or the church.

So, what do all of these things say to you and to me in our own life circumstances? Can God call us to do a work? Can He equip us for the task and then send us out to do it? Do we always have a choice in accepting His call upon our souls? Can we refuse Him?

Again, for myself, I do very much want to be fully available and fully surrendered to the Lord Jesus in all of His decisions involving me. I want to join with Him and be a faithful disciple, whenever and to whatever calling He might choose. Are you ready and willing to do the same?

In Psalm 23, God gave David words of assurance and of hope and of trust for all the next things that would lie ahead of him. And He also gave those words to you and to me. Listen, and we will close with these reassuring words.

- 1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
- 2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
- 3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou *art* with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever. (Psalm 23:1-6)

May we pray.