

## A General Overview of Twelve Ordinary Men

Luke 6:14-16

February 12, 2017

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."

We've spent time over the past two weeks really learning the significance of this group of men, this list of names, the significance of the Apostles and the apostolic ministry. The 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 in 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 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 the 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 in 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. 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.

So for the next several weeks, we're going to take some time to get some clear character sketches of these men because they are going to be involved in the rest of the story starting here and all the way through the rest of Luke and into Acts. All the way through Acts we're going to see these men. They're going to show up again and again. These men are featured from here on out, and they become instruments in the Master's hands to teach the church, to stabilize it, to grow it. In fact, right after they're named, they go right into training. Jesus teaches them in the Sermon on the Mount.

But for today, I want to start out with a general overview of these twelve ordinary men. In fact, that's the title of this morning's sermon: A General Overview of Twelve Ordinary

Men. And you say, "Could you have chosen a more boring title?" No, probably not. I was really working on that, just the sheer boredom. But if you think the title is bad, check out the outline points if you haven't glanced at them already in your bulletin. Take a look at your bulletin because these are really ordinary: Some General Introductions, Some General Observations, point number three, guess what? Some General Lessons and then Some General Cautions. But the boring very ordinary and plain title and outline points really are quite fitting, aren't they? I certainly don't intend to make a point of the outline itself, but it really does illustrate the heart of today's study. As the Psalmist said in Psalm 115:1, "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!" And that's what these men show us. It's not to us. There's no human explanation for any of this. It's all to the glory of God, the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. As the Reformers put it, *Soli deo Gloria*. To God alone be the glory.

And having said that, though, 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. We're going to set a course this morning, a baseline, a little foundation to launch

future studies so we can get some character sketches on these Apostles. And we're going to enjoy the fruit of that over the next few weeks as we study these men.

So without further ado, let's start wading through the plain vanilla outline with point one: General Introductions. We have noted before in the past couple of weeks that this list of Apostles is just one of four lists. These lists we found in Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, this one here in Luke 6:14-16, 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, thus the absence of his name. We saw that last week. But by comparing these lists, if you put them, as I did, in a table, a Word document and you compare the names side by side, we found out each list is organized into the same groups. Each of the three groups of names has four names each, for a total of 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 and vice versa.

Also, in each of the groups, the same name heads each list in each of the groups. So, for example, the first group consists of Peter and Andrew and James and John. And Peter is always listed at the first of that list. He's at the head of that list. The second group consists of Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas. And Philip is at the head of that list. The final group consists of James son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas son of James and Judas Iscariot. And in that list James son of Alphaeus is always first, and Judas Iscariot always last.

Now what do those lists show with these three distinct groups of Apostles, each group headed by the same name? Those lists reveal what is clearly portrayed in the Gospel narratives, that there were three different levels of intimacy among the twelve Apostles. You might think of them as concentric circles of intimacy with a close circle and then a circle that is a little further out and then a circle that is even more remote. Some were relationally closer to Christ and some of them were more distant relationally than others. Even if you don't have all the names of the twelve Apostles memorized, you can even see this through a superficial familiarity with the New Testament. That will show you that Peter, James and John occupied a very

special place with the Lord. For better or worse, they always seem to be right there at the center of all the action.

When Jesus entered the inner room of Jairus' house 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, 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." 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 the closest circle. Andrew is 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, 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 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 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 Simon to Jesus and Jesus took one look and said in verse 42, "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 actual character, but Jesus even at this early stage is 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." There's the connection that Philip had with them. Verse 45, "Philip found Nathaniel 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.'" Nathaniel, by the way, is another name for Bartholomew. The two names—Philip and Nathaniel, Philip and Bartholomew—those are in the second list. They also had an early introduction to Jesus. It's interesting how Nathaniel's reply to Philip gives us an insight into his character, something that would really naturally keep him slightly more distant in a relational sense to Jesus. Look in verse 46 as John, the beloved Apostle, writes

in his narrative here, "Nathaniel 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 that interaction, that interplay between these two men, something about their character and their nature. Those two—Philip and Nathaniel, Philip and Bartholomew—those are in the second tier of disciples.

Then there is a third group, another group 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 are all relatively unknown to us. There's something instructive about that in and of itself.

We're all going to get more familiar with these men in the coming weeks, but for now, 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 man named John. And Jesus said even at their first meeting in 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, 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. They 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? And we're going to have a lot more to say about it next week. Peter is 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 we see parts of our own character in Peter. It's no wonder he plays prominently in the biblical text. Peter wrote 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 before John. John is the younger brother. And they are the two sons of Zebedee, a man who seems to have been at that time 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 as far as Jerusalem. If you're in John, you can flip over toward the end of that Gospel and look at Chapter 18. When Jesus was in custody having been betrayed by Judas in the beginning of the chapter, he is taken before this kangaroo court, this false pseudo trial, and he's taken to the High Priest Annas' 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 in the Gospel that he authored, as this unnamed disciple. Or sometimes he calls himself "the disciple whom Jesus loved." That's almost even better than using his name, isn't it? He kind of throws that in all the time. "I'm close to him, you know. I'm the disciple Jesus loved." But it says there in John 18:15, "Simon

Peter followed Jesus and so did another disciple and since that disciple was known to the High Priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the High Priest, but Peter stood outside the door. And so the other disciple [again it says] who was known to the High Priest went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door and brought Peter in."

Isn't that interesting? He is known by name to the High Priest and he is able to enter freely, and he also seems to bear some level of authority, some level of influence as he goes and speaks to the servant girl, and she doesn't exclude Peter, but lets him in. We don't know the exact connection of this family, but James and John seem to enjoy some advantages through the connections of their father, Zebedee, with this privileged access to the High Priest's house.

Another interesting fact about the family of James and John is 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 become part of his innermost circle of the Apostles. James, as a figure, 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, described in Acts 12:1-2. 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 wrote the Gospel of John. He wrote the three epistles that bear his name, 1, 2 and 3 John. And he also authored the Book of Revelation. It is interesting to see in the beginning of the Book of Revelation that by the time John wrote down that book, that revelation he received from Jesus Christ, there is no hint whatsoever of the familial familiarity that existed between John and his cousin Jesus.

When the risen Lord Jesus Christ appears to John while John is on exile on the island of Patmos, John, writing Revelation 1:17, says, "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. As I mentioned already, Philip is the first name in the second group of disciples. From what we can tell, he was an eager learner. He's interested and he's curious, and he often seems to struggle to understand what Jesus 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 seemed to have had a good friendship, to have shared a friendship. We saw in John 1:43 that 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 link they share, a hometown, and then he's the one who found Nathaniel.

And Nathaniel takes us into the second list. As I mentioned, Nathaniel is Bartholomew. The name "Bartholomew" literally means "son of Talomei," which speaks to the prominence of his father, as he's known as Bartholomew-Bar and then son of Talomei. So it could speak to the prominence of his father, or it could refer to some prominent trait that belonged to his father that is also notable in him. It's hard to tell which, but he's the one of whom Jesus said, "Behold, an Israelite in whom there is no deceit." This Bartholomew, this Nathaniel guy, is guileless. He's plain-speaking. He's straightforward. You might think of him like a Northeasterner, maybe someone from New Jersey or New York, who tells you exactly what they think, even if you don't really want to know.

The next two men on the list round out the second group of Apostles, Matthew and Thomas. Matthew, as we know, we've already been introduced to him in Luke 5:27 and following 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 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, the discipleship. We love Matthew's story, don't we? 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 became the tool for the authorship of the earliest Gospel, the Gospel of Matthew.

The man often paired with Matthew is Thomas in the list. Apparently, his name Thomas is Aramaic in origin, it means "twin." You may remember that in John's Gospel—three times in John's Gospel in fact—Thomas is called Didymus, which means "the twin." I don't really know what that refers to, twin of whom? We don't know, but that's what the disciples called him, "the

twin." He's better remembered as "doubting Thomas." He's the kind of guy who had a little more pessimistic nature. Do you know anybody like that? Glass-half-empty kind of a guy, you know? Always the Johnny Raincloud in your midst telling you everything bad that is going to happen. He's always quoting Murphy's Law to you. If anything bad can happen, it will.

Thanks, Eeyore, appreciate that!

When the rejoicing Apostles came to Thomas and talked to him about the risen Lord, their enthusiasm is ever so slightly diminished by the response of Thomas. In John 20:25, he said, "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails; and place my hand into his side, I will never believe." He does not say, "I'm not likely to believe." Isn't that interesting? Because of that response that some people, atheists love him, 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 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, come great belief, great strength for the Apostle to the East.

Another group of Apostles: the Third Group. This is the group that is most remote, the least known to us: James and Simon and Judas. James, son of Alphaeus is also known as James the Lesser, 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 *micros* 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 Jim, Big Jimmy, 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? Not much is known about this Little James, but as James the son of Alphaeus, it would appear he is also one of those Apostles who is related to Jesus Christ. There is strong evidence that Clopas, or Cleopas

is also how it is written in John 19:25, is the same man as James' father, also known as Alphaeus. Clopas or Cleopas appears to be the brother of Joseph, which would make James, the son of Alphaeus, another of Jesus' cousins, but this one on his father's side, so even more remote than being on Jesus' mother Mary's side.

The next man, Simon the Zealot, associates him with a political party with 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, the Zealot Party, that was prone to use violence to achieve political ends. We're starting to see more of that violence for achieving political ends in our own country, aren't we? So this Zealot Party was prone to violence, and a group of them became assassins. Some of you may know the names of the assassin group. They're called the Sicarii. They assassinated Roman officials. Josephus does not like these guys at all when he writes about them. He credits the Zealot Party for bringing about the final destruction and wrath of Rome as the Romans destroy Rome in 70 AD. Simon, if he was not saved by Jesus Christ at this time, he probably would've died in that massacre as well, but Christ rescued him from his

sins first, called him to apostleship, and actually made something useful of his life. A testimony of grace.

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 refer to him not as Judas or Thaddaeus, but as Lebbeus. It's likely he was known by three names, Judas, Thaddaeus and Lebbeus. The last two are like nicknames. And it's not hard to understand why this guy would prefer to be known by a nickname. I mean, if your name was Judas, in light of the next name on the list, wouldn't you want to go by a different name as well? In John's Gospel, John records a time when Judas son of James asked Jesus a question, and he writes in John 14:22, that "Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, how is it you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?'" There is quite a stigma attached to the name "Judas" after he betrayed Jesus to death. In fact, you might know this, but the little epistle at the end of our Bible just before the book of Revelation, if you're turning too fast, you'll miss it—that little epistle, do you know what the name of it is? Jude, right? That's the name of Jesus' half-brother and his name is actually not Jude, but Judas. We prefer

Jude. Nicknames for Judas here, Thaddaeus and Lebbeus, are both good alternatives to call him. Lebbeus has as its root the Hebrew word for "heart," which is *leb*. Thaddaeus came from Aramaic. It could mean heart. It also could mean praise. So perhaps we could think of Judas son of James as the Apostle with the heart of praise. It must have been a joy to be around him, we kind of want to pair him up with Thomas. Let them kind of cancel each other out.

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. 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 the name Iscariot refers to his origin. Iscariot is literally *ish*, the Hebrew word for "man," plus *Carioth*. So *ish Carioth*, he is literally "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 note that Judas Iscariot's identity is Judean.

That brings us into a second and even a third point in our outline. We just got some general introductions. Now, second, let's make some general observations. And we're also going to cover at the same time, the third point in our outline, some general lessons. We'll put the two of those together. So don't be confused by that if we go back and forth between them. Our observations are really going to tie right into some important lessons for us as well. 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? Regarding that last question, we need to understand that these are twelve ordinary men, twelve regular, common men. They are nothing remarkable in and of themselves. They

are nothing to be written home about, like all of us, really. And the less prominent among the twelve who are not known, we just know their names and maybe a thing or two they said, but we don't know much in history. Yet they were used as the foundation of the church that we are now a part of.

Listen, so much has happened throughout all of church history by unknowns. And we're among them. We count ourselves privileged, joyful to be among the unnamed because the less we're known, the more Christ is known, the more he is what explains the longevity and the strength and the steadfastness of this thing we call the Church. We're good with that. I hope you are. I hope we're not all trying to make our mark on history because God is in control of that. Judas Iscariot was a guy who wanted to make a mark in history. Sometimes you don't want to be that mark. It's a black mark. It's a blot. Let's be content with finding where God wants to use us and doing that with all our might. We'll do it with all our might and we'll leave the results to him.

These men, most of them, are Galileans. They're people whose region is 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. Except for 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. If you're in John's Gospel, turn back to John chapter 2 when Jesus entered Jerusalem for the first time early on in his ministry. Do you remember what happened there? Look at verse 13 and we'll start there, 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.'"

It'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 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 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, 'Destroy this temple, and in 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. 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. 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. "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. He seemed to be sympathetic and friendly in this meeting, even respectful and somewhat admiring. Remember, 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; you 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 not born again. He does not believe.

As a contrast, let's turn over to Matthew's Gospel in Matthew 16 and look at verse 13. 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 in 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, and 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 replies, '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 and said no more on that occasion, that would have been great, perfect. But 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—are 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 we saw in Luke 5 and 6. Remember, Jesus did the unthinkable in the judgment of Israel's Sabbath Day watchdogs, anyway. He had the audacity to heal a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath Day. It wasn't a life-threatening issue. 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? 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 is early on evidence of Jesus. And as he sought the will of his Father on that occasion in 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 and not another number? Because, again, this ties to the indictment 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 throne 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 included in this, right? "For 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 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."

You know, growing up, it's probably every country, but especially in our country, going through grade school and junior high and high school and into high school, we all want to be something, don't we? We're all told we can achieve great things. We get bumper stickers even for being mediocre, you know: "My child is a student." Whatever. But some of us make honor roll. And we all want to be something. And we're "gold" here in America. You can be president if you want to. Frankly, you look at some of the presidents we've had, and you do look at what a great country this is because you don't have to be aristocracy to ascend into high, political office or places of great influence. But you know, the opportunity in our country does create another opportunity, and that's the opportunity for pride, for thinking that we, ourselves as individuals must matter on the world's stage, that we must be something, that we must be not what is foolish in the world, but wise in the world. We want people to respect us for our wisdom, for our strength, for our power, for our influence, for whatever it is. Folks, that is the wrong way to think.



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 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 care about. It's what God uses, though. These twelve men represent divine judgment on the religious establishment in Jerusalem, the wealth, the power, the intellectual achievements of men, 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 noble, and he elevated this group of nobodies. These nobodies were 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 we can make and lessons we can learn as well. Let me be brief and just mention one. 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 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, as in a cut diamond, the more angles on that diamond, the more it displays the

light. It's the 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 a purpose. And in each local church, we have young and old, 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 their diversity to demonstrate that the church is also equally diverse, manifesting the full-orbed, wide-arrayed glory of God.

The second thing we see is the unity 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 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, and 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 and knocks that statue into pieces. It grows into 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; and there are 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 Christ because on his own, Simon was weak and vacillating, but this guy endured to the very end. He died with the good testimony of a martyr, and 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 his power, and all of that just gives us hope.

The 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 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 for next week, not just for the character studies of the Apostles, but also for all biblical study. All biblical study is going to be included in these cautions. 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, to apply.

So first, be careful as you read. 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 at our bookstores and online is that which attempts to make these stories more familiar to us in our time. It reminds me of when I was growing up as a little kid, I

saw those maps in school. Did you ever see those maps with those 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 divides it and 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? 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 is 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 must allow that story on the pages of Scripture to be as unfamiliar as it actually is and let that unfamiliarity make us somewhat uncomfortable. I was listening to a lecture from church historian Carl Trueman of Westminster

Seminary. He was talking about this very tendency and applying it to how people read Martin Luther. They want to read him as if he's a purely modern thinker like one of us, rather than like a pre-modern thinker. Luther's fear about the devil, his fears about traveling through the dark forest at night and thinking the goblins are all going to come and eat him up—those fears were very real to him; they're not just a bunch of metaphors. He's a pre-modern German living in a pre-modern world like all Europeans at the time. Truman was saying that we need to read Luther as a man of his time.

The same caution applies to us as well as we study Scripture, as we see Jesus and his Apostles speaking and acting. Our first reading should not be to make them more familiar to us, to attempt to smooth out all the rough edges and ignore the things that seem odd to us. Rather, we need to pick at those unfamiliar threads and pull them out from the fabric of the story so we can observe those strands more carefully. It's good and instructive to understand what's unfamiliar to us. When we do that, we're going to see their true humanness, all their creaturely qualities as they interact with their world. And at that point, and only at that point, will we make the connection to our own lives in our own time now. We're



going to find common ground with them as creatures interacting with the world and culture around us. Just as an example of that—you don't have to turn there—but in Luke Chapter 9:51 to 56, you know what happened when Jesus said, "Hey, we're going to travel through Samaria"? Remember that? The Samaritans said, "No, you can't come through here." Do you remember what the Sons of Thunder did then? James and John? "Let us call down fire from heaven and consume them." Remember that? They're not speaking metaphorically there. That was no joke. They really did intend to use the power that Christ had given them to call down fire from heaven and burn the Samaritans alive. They're very serious about that, and they thought they were justified. They thought this was something to be commended for, this zeal. It's a horrible thought, isn't it? It really should shock us. And then it should lead us to ask questions, so we seek to understand what explains that kind of prejudice and that kind of hostility.

It leads to a second caution about reading the biblical narrative, and particularly reading about the foibles and the follies of the Apostles. We need to slow down and make sure we understand the text and then reflect on it long enough and apply it to ourselves in a rebuking and correcting way. We should

never think, "Wow, I would never think and act like those guys, say those kinds of things." Oh, really? Take the Sons of Thunder calling down fire on the Samaritans. Have we ever had those kinds of impulses? I've heard people say, "We should just nuke the Middle East, turn all that sand into glass." Really? As Christians you're going to say that? Those are human beings out there we're talking about. Those are people made in the image of God. Those are families—precious men, women and children, by the way. As Christians, do we really want to nuke them? Is that what we want to see happen? We want a strong man in the oval office to push the button? It's one thing to say, "Nuke them," from Greeley, Colorado, when you've got no nukes at your disposal, no power to launch nuclear warheads, but it's entirely another thing to say that with your finger on the button. That's what these two Apostles, James and John, were saying because they had power. They had just displayed it in mighty acts of miracles, signs and wonders. No wonder Jesus called them "Sons of Thunder."

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 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, 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 faith.