

The Master and His Men

Luke 6:12-19

The sun slipped behind the western ridge. The hot, dry wind died down. And in the hush before cool night breezes blew in off the Mediterranean, the lake mirrored a convoy of pink and purple clouds sailing in from the sea.

The great company that followed Jesus crowded around the shore. Arrayed around campfires, they were busy roasting fish for supper. So only a few of them saw the Savior fade into the twilight as He walked alone up toward the steep hill that rose up from the flat plain beside the lakeshore.

By the time stars swarmed over the lake and night winds fanned the dying embers of the fires, the Savior's followers were all asleep. But alone on the mountaintop, He was not.

It was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. Verse 12

When the sun was still a sliver of orange on the eastern horizon, a veil of mist hung over the lake. And the grass was damp with dew. The disciples awoke, rubbed their eyes, and started stirring the ashes of the fires.

It was a day like any other. Or so it seemed. But then they saw Jesus walking back down the mountain slope. It had taken a long night of prayer. But He was finally ready to select some men to serve Him as messengers and missionaries.

The Gospel accounts of that morning are more than mere history. There are lessons for us for us in this simple story. After all, Jesus is still selecting men and women to serve and stand for Him.

And He just might be calling you.

The Men

Standing on the slope of the hill above the crowd, the Savior started calling out names.

Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James and John; and Philip and Bartholomew; and Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot; Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. Verses 16-19

The people in the crowd below were surprised at the names Jesus called out. They were not the best and brightest of those who had chosen to follow the Nazarene. There did not even seem to be a discernable pattern to the men Christ called.

They were a motley mix of men with radically different dispositions. Some were brash and boastful like Peter. Others were shy and withdrawn like Andrew. Still others were impulsive and emotional. Some, like Thomas, were careful and critical. And two of them, James and John, were so hot-tempered; Jesus nicknamed them the Sons of Thunder.

Their backgrounds were not alike either. Four were fishermen with thick calluses on their hands from pulling at oars. Matthew was a wealthy tax collector, a collaborator with the occupying Roman army. Simon was a radical, anti-Roman terrorist. And ancient legends say Philip was a chariot driver.

They were not all Galileans, either. Judas was from Kerioth in southern Judah. Two were from Cana. Others came from Capernaum. And still others were raised in Gentile communities.

As candidates for the ministry go, they were not very impressive. No mission organization or church board would have even considered one of the men the Master chose after His long night of prayer. None of them had much education beyond a few years at small town synagogue schools. And

at least one of them had a rather shady business background.

There was no spark of brilliance or charisma in their eyes when they heard the Master call their names that morning. They were simple, small town tradesmen. Yet the Son of God, whose wisdom and insight are infinite and absolute, chose those men even as He chooses men and women now. And that is highly significant.

It means that no one who hears Christ=s call today can say he or she is unfit to serve the Savior. We are neither too uneducated nor unintelligent. Neither are we too impulsive, angry, or introverted. We cannot even say we have lived lives that are too sinful, shady, or sordid. If Christ calls, you are qualified.

Still, we must not be confused as we read Luke=s account. None of those twelve men were volunteers. They did not apply to serve as apostles. Jesus chose them. The same night He was led away in chains, Jesus said so Himself.

You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, John 15:16

No, Jesus did not choose those twelve men by sifting through the resumes of willing volunteers. He personally selected the men He wanted. That was true then. And it still is today.

The Mission

None of the other Gospel writers bothered to mention it. Only Luke gave a name to the position to which Christ called these men.

And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles: Verse 13

Our Redeemer referred to the twelve as apostles. It comes from a word meaning to send. So we might call these men those who are sent. Quite simply, they were divinely appointed messengers.

But that day on a hillside above the Sea of Galilee, they were not at all ready to serve their Savior. Not yet.

Like every servant of God, they needed training. No, not classes, textbooks or training courses. Their training was much deeper and more demanding than any seminary. Mark put it best.

He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him... Mark 3:14

Our Lord had no illusions about the men He called that morning beside the lake. He knew they were unfit and ill-prepared to fulfill the high and holy office to which He appointed them. Mark wrote that Jesus called these twelve men for a reason. To be with Him! That is always Christ=s first call not, to serve but be with Him.

Our Savior summoned the twelve to walk with Him in the closest possible personal relationship. And He calls men to that same intimate walk with Him today.

Those twelve men would spend the better part of the next two years at the Savior=s side. They would listen as He taught them on grassy hillsides, in noisy markets, and along dusty footpaths.

They would see how He treated the desperate, the diseased and the despairing. They would watch how He reacted when wicked enemies taunted Him and even His own family tried to turn Him away from His ministry and mission on earth.

During the golden days they walked with Jesus, the men He chose did not realize it, but day by day they were being changed. Just by being with Him, they were becoming more and more like the Man they followed.

That change was so profound, in the end even bitter enemies could not help but notice it. After God=s Son returned to His heavenly Father=s throne, two of those men, Peter and John, stood in the

temple council room before the Sanhedrin.

And when they spoke, even the hard-hearted Jews who sat on the stone benches before them could see how those former fishermen had changed.

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. Acts 4:13 (NIV)

The lesson for Christian men and women today is obvious. If we would grow into the image of our Master, we must spend time with Him. We must spend time with Him in prayer, opening both our minds and our hearts to the still small voice of His Spirit.

We must not only read His Word. We must memorize and meditate upon it until it overshadows all our thoughts. And as we study the Gospel accounts of Jesus= life on earth, we must imitate Him, acting and reacting like He did.

That is why Paul spent three years in the Arabian desert alone with Christ before he began his life as a missionary for the Master. No man is fit to serve our Savior who has not spent time alone with Him. That is the only way we can become like Him.

And it is imperative that we be think and act like Jesus After all, the message our Master=s servants were sent to share required much more than merely speaking words.

Yes, all but one of these apostles would stand before crowds of men and speak. Several of them would also write Christ=s message down on leather scrolls. And for thousands of years, people would not only read those words. They would also memorize and meditate upon them.

But that was not all those apostles were to do. The words they spoke and wrote were not even the most powerful and important way they were to deliver their Master=s message.

Our Savior still sends men out into the world. And those He sends still have the same mission. They are to show the Lord=s light to people who dwell in the darkness of death and despair.

And to do that, Christ=s messengers must not merely tell people about Jesus. Like the gentiles who came to Philip at Jerusalem, people must also see Jesus.

Just as the apostles did, they must see the way our Redeemer responds to people with pain and problems. They must see His life and love, His grace and goodness, His purity and patience.

But Jesus is no longer here. He is in Heaven. So the only way people can see Him is in us. So we simply must be like our Lord if we are to be His messengers.

And the only way we can become like Jesus is to spend time with Him. Only then can we shine the Savior=s love with our lives.

Luke=s abbreviated account of the apostles= appointment abruptly changes as Christ came down from the mountain slope.

Jesus came down with them and stood on a level place; Verse 17

It is important to notice that Jesus did not come down to the level plain alone. No, He came down, Luke wrote, with them.

The disciples did not spend the long night in prayer on the mountain with their Master. But when Christ called out their names, they walked up the slope to stand with Him.

And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. Mark 3:13

When Jesus called out their names, it was a moment of decision for the twelve. They were to respond by leaving the company of half-committed followers below and climbing up to a higher plane with Jesus. And so are we.

By stepping up the slope, they were making a complete commitment to Christ. They were leaving all their reservations behind and making a resolute, irreversible decision to commit themselves absolutely and utterly into His hands.

They knew what we must learn. Answering Christ=s call demands that we leave all our reservations and doubts behind. If we will not consecrate ourselves completely, body, soul and spirit, into His holy hands, we cannot simply serve Him.

Half hearted servants bring only shame to the Savior.

The Message

The plain below was crowded with people. Some were disciples who had chosen to follow Jesus. But most came with deep desires and painful, pressing needs.

...there was a large crowd of His disciples, and a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases; and those who were troubled with unclean spirits were being cured. Verses 17-18

The finest teachers in all of Judaism lived at Jerusalem. But the truths those rabbis taught about God left spiritual seekers dry and empty. And their hearts still thirsted for living water.

In a world polluted by paganism and empty, aimless atheism, people still seek the security of spiritual truth. Education offers no life changing wisdom. Neither do art and literature. And the truths of science and philosophy constantly change.

Only Jesus offers real truth. But our Savior does not merely teach spiritual truths that never change. He is the eternal truth of God that can satisfy the thirsty soul.

Other people came all the way from the bustling business center and busy seaport of Sidon. By hard experience, they had learned the wisdom of what Solomon said. Money and material wealth cannot and do not satisfy.

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, Ecclesiastes 5:10

But Jesus offers sweet serenity, abiding peace, and deep satisfaction that is available no where else on earth. In fact, He said, that is one of the reasons why He came: that we might have an abundant life. And that is precisely what He gives those who come to Him in confession and commitment.

Still others were driven by agony and anguish. Some hobbled the dusty road to Galilee on crutches. Others ached with excruciating, unrelenting pain. Still others were feeble and fevered with lingering illnesses.

But the most pitiful of all were those who came because their brightest noon days had become darker than midnight. Somehow, dark and despicable demons had taken control of their lives.

Soothsayers and shamans tried their chants and rituals. But nothing helped. Satan=s servants were far too strong for them.

But the prince of darkness= strength is not supreme. Our Savior is infinitely more powerful than our eternal adversary.

So the possessed joined the sick and the dissatisfied on the long road north to Galilee. But a question remains.

How did they know that Jesus had healing in His hands? How did they learn Christ offered peace and purpose? And how did they know He could send Satan scurrying away like a wounded rat?

The answer is kindergarten simple. Somewhere, somehow, someone told them about Jesus. Only then did those who suffered seek the Savior and find all the peace and power they needed.

And all the people were trying to touch Him, for power was coming from Him and healing them all. Verse 19

That was the reason our Redeemer called and commissioned men to serve as apostles that day in Galilee. And it is the same reason why He seeks servants today.

People need Jesus= power and peace, His joy and truth. But someone has to tell them. If no one tells people about Christ, they are utterly and absolutely without hope.

But how are they to call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? Romans 10:14 (ESV)

People need Jesus. And if we do not tell them, who will?