

“The Twelve”

(Luke 6:12-16)

Introduction

➤ I think it is safe to say that most everyone (if not everyone) – if given the opportunity – would have gone about selecting Jesus’ twelve apostles differently than Jesus did. In fact, I’m convinced that (apart from divine intervention) we would not have even come close to selecting the Twelve men that Jesus called to be His apostles. One commentator reasoned that Judas would probably have been the only one of the Twelve who would seem like a logical or intelligent choice to be one of Jesus’ apostles (he may be more right than we care to admit).

Most likely, no human search committee or task force would have selected the twelve men Christ chose to be His apostles. Perhaps the main reason why this would be true is the fact that the twelve men Jesus selected to be His twelve apostles were terribly common men. As we will see, there is really nothing extraordinary about them (at least, not until *after* Christ transforms and empowers them!). They really had no political clout, no religious authority, and no influential family pedigree. In fact, they were almost completely unknown. They were simple, common, and ordinary men (most of whom were simple fishermen). The reason they stand out to us today is because they did not stand out even in their own time. It is therefore surprising that these men would be the ones whom Jesus would choose to be His twelve apostles.

➤ The compelling question before us is this: “What kind of men would Jesus choose to be His closest and most trusted disciples – those men whom He would call to be apostles – the first Christian leaders whom God would use to change the world?” As has already been stated, most likely none of us would look at this list of these twelve men (Matt.10:1-4; Mk.3:13-19; Lk.6:12-16) and conclude that these are the perfect men in whom Christ will use to change the world. More likely, we would look at this list scratch our heads and wonder if these apostles could do all that Christ would call them to do. We might even think, “How could God seek to use these men to accomplish His perfect and powerful plan?” This is not to be overly critical of these twelve men. It is just a simple matter of fact. They were remarkably common men.

Of course, the same could be asked of us today! For most of us are not socially influential, politically powerful or financially affluent. We are living proof that God loves and redeems common ordinary people. God has what seems to be a strange attraction to weakness and commonness. Over and over in Scripture we read of God doing extraordinary things through ordinary people – people like these twelve apostles and people like us.

1 Cor 1:26-31 ~ “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. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’”

➤ As we study Luke 6:12-16 two things become abundantly clear: the apostles were ordinary men with an extraordinary calling. It is clear that if God is going to do give these twelve ordinary apostles an extraordinary calling, then He is going to have to use extraordinary means. And that is what God does. He takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary; He uses common men and women to do uncommon things; He will do exceptional things through people who are otherwise unexceptional; He turns the mundane and the profane into something that is sacred. In the hands of the Almighty, are ordinary people doing extraordinary things. This is certainly true of these twelve apostles. For they are Twelve ordinary men with one extraordinary calling from God!

Luke 6:12-16 ~ “In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. ¹³And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.”

➤ For this morning’s message, I want us to look at the calling of the apostles and then some facts about the apostles.

A. One Extraordinary Calling (vs.12-13)

➤ The calling of the twelve apostles was extraordinary because it was the singular and supreme decision of the one and only sovereign God. These men were chosen and appointed by Christ Himself. They were not selected by some “apostolic search committee” nor were handed over to Christ by some other religious organization. They were called and commissioned by none other than the Incarnate – God wrapped in human flesh – Son of God Himself! Luke gives us three components of Jesus’ extraordinary calling of these twelve men.

1. Jesus earnestly prayed

➤ In verse twelve, we read: *“In these days [Jesus] went out to the mountain to pray”* (vs.12). This *“mountain”* is not specified, and therefore not important. The reason He went to the mountain was not a means of “getting closer to God”, but a means of being “alone with God.” That is, Jesus looked for a remote or deserted place where He could pray to God without interruption or distraction.

Luke 5:16 ~ “But he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.”

Luke 9:28 ~ [Christ’s transfiguration] “Now about eight days after these sayings he took with him Peter and John and James and went up on the mountain to pray.”

Luke 9:37 ~ “On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him.”

John 6:15 ~ “Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

➤ Of course, when it comes to how we should live the Christian life, Jesus is our perfect example. With the crowds increasing and intensifying (with pressures and demands mounting) we read that Jesus *“went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God”* (vs.12). The verb *“all night he continued”* (*dianyktereuō*) refers to an all-night prayer vigil.

Rom 12:12 ~ “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant [*proskartereō*] in prayer.”

Col 4:2 ~ “Continue steadfastly [*proskartereō*] in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

1 Thess 5:17 ~ “pray without ceasing [*adialeiptōs*]”

➤ It is likely that during His night spent praying to God, Jesus prayed about the apostles (although the text does not say). Throughout the Gospels we see that Jesus prayed before major events and decisions (e.g., Lk.3:21; 5:16; 9:18, 28-29; 11:1; 22:32, 40-46). Jesus – the one and only Son of God, the 2nd member of the Trinity, the Incarnate Christ, the Savior of the World, the perfect and sinless Messiah – spent massive amount of time in prayer while He lived on earth! It would seem that if anyone who has ever lived and walked on this planet did not need to pray it was Jesus. Yet, time and time again we read that Jesus was regularly in prayer with His Father, and often for extensive periods of time (e.g., from night until morning).

This is always convicting to me: Since Jesus Christ was so committed to prayer, *how much more* should His followers be committed to prayer? Since Jesus Christ prayed for hours and hours throughout the day, *how more time* should His followers be in prayer each and every day? Since Jesus was faithfully in constant communion with His Father, *how much more* should His followers be faithfully in communion with God? Clearly, Jesus models for His followers that prayer is an immensely valuable and vital part of the Christian's life (see Mk.11:17; Lk.18:1).

2. Jesus personally called (the Twelve)

- The apostles did not seek the position of apostleship, nor was the decision up for a vote. Jesus personally, from His disciples, specifically called the twelve apostles: *“And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles”* (vs.13).

Mark 3:13 ~ “And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired [*thelō*], and they came to him”

- This is quick remarkable when we understand that Jesus intentionally chose Judas (Iscaiot) knowing that Judas would betray Him (Jn.6:64; 13:11). Scripture reveals that Judas was *“a devil”* (Jn.6:70-71), *“a thief”* (Jn.12:6), an unbeliever (Jn.6:64), and spiritually unclean (Jn.13:10). With full knowledge of all these things, Jesus called Judas and named him an apostle.

This was to fulfill Scripture, which served not only to identify Jesus as the Messiah (fulfilling all Messianic prophecies) but to further demonstrate the sufferings that He would endure (Heb.2:18; 4:15). Jesus would not only be tortured and crucified by the hands of *“lawless men”* (Acts 2:23), but He would also be betrayed by one of His own.

Luke 22:21-23 ~ ““But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. ²²For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!’ ²³And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.”

Matt 26:20-25 ~ “When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹And as they were eating, he said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.’ ²²And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, ‘Is it I, Lord?’ ²³He answered, ‘He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. ²⁴The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.’ ²⁵Judas, who would betray him, answered, ‘Is it I, Rabbi?’ He said to him, ‘You have said so.’”

Luke 22:47-49 ~ “While [Jesus] was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, ⁴⁸but Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?’”

Matt 26:48-50 ~ “Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, ‘The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.’ ⁴⁹And he came up to Jesus at once and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ And he kissed him. ⁵⁰Jesus said to him, ‘Friend, do what you came to do.’ Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him.”

John 13:10-11 ~ “Jesus said to him, ‘The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.’ ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’”

John 13:18-19 ~ “I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me’ [Ps.41:9]. ¹⁹I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he.”

John 17:12 ~ “While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.” [see Ps.41:9]

➤ Jesus’ calling of Judas is a sobering reminder and warning to us all. It is possible to act like a Christian and not be a Christian. It is possible to profess Christ and not possess Christ. It is possible to (outwardly) live the Christian life and not be (inwardly) a true follower of Jesus Christ. It is possible to be very religious and utterly unsaved. Judas did have a true love for Christ, and his “works” were not truly for Christ.

To be sure, all of the apostles were imperfect, but Judas was a fake – a hypocrite. Judas fooled others, but he certainly did not fool God (Gal.6:7). Our love for Christ will not be perfect, but it must be real. Our faith in Christ will not be flawless, but it must be genuine.

➤ In the Gospels, Judas is often described as “*one of the twelve*” (Matt.26:14, 47; Mk.14:10, 20, 43; Lk.22:47; Jn.6:71). In fact, this designation is almost exclusively reserved for Judas [Jn.20:24 being the only exception]. One of Jesus’ own apostles, one of His closest friends, betrayed Him – even with a kiss!

This shows us that God can use even the worse evils – the betrayal and crucifixion of His one and only Son – as part of His sovereign redemptive plan (Acts 1:16-17; 4:27-28). God is not threatened by evil or evildoers, and His sovereign will cannot be delayed, derailed, or defeated.

3. Jesus sovereignly appointed (the Twelve)

➤ The designation of “apostle” was not merely a badge of honor. It came with a tremendous responsibility. The twelve were “*named apostles*” (vs.13; *onomazō apostolos*), and thereby given the work of an apostle.

The word “*disciple*” (*mathētēs*) means student or learner, whereas the word “*apostle*” (*apostolos*; lit. “sent one”) refers to a messenger or delegate. Not every disciple was an apostle, but (with the exception of Judas) every apostle was also a disciple.

Mark 3:14-15 ~ “And he appointed [*poieō*] twelve (whom he also named [*onomazō*] apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵and have authority to cast out demons.”

Luke 9:1-6 ~ “And he called the twelve together and gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, ²and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal. ³And he said to them, ‘Take nothing for your journey, no staff, nor bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not have two tunics. ⁴And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. ⁵And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them.’ ⁶And they departed and went through the villages, preaching the gospel and healing everywhere.” (see Matt.10)

➤ It is important to note that the apostles were not given these tasks immediately after they met Jesus. Their apostolic calling came in three stages (although Scripture does not record each apostle’s individual encounter with Jesus):

- 1) Conversion (John 1:35-51) ~ They first came to believe that Jesus is the Christ, and to be disciples of Christ.
- 2) Ministry (Matt.4:18-22; Mk.1:16-20; Lk.5:1-11) ~ Sometime later (some suggest about a year later), they were called to abandon their occupations and follow Jesus in ministry – which they did.
- 3) Apostleship (Matt.10:1-42; Mk.3:13-19; 6:7-13; Lk.6:12-16; 9:1-6) ~ Once all the Twelve were assembled, Jesus commissioned them to be His apostles – which literally means “sent ones.” Jesus gave them the authority to preach, to cast out demons, and to heal the sick.

➤ It was only after Jesus taught them, and showed them by example, that the apostles were called. It was at this time that He gave them spiritual “*power and authority*” (Lk.9:1) and sent them to “*proclaim the kingdom of God*” (Lk.9:2), and they went “*preaching the gospel*” (Lk.9:6) and “*healing everywhere*” (Lk.9:6). God always enables and equips believers to obey His commands (see Ezek.36:27; Jn.15:5; 2Cor.9:8; Eph.2:10; 2Tim.3:16-17; Heb.13:20-21)

B. Twelve Ordinary Men (vs.14-16)

- First let me identify for you some interesting facts about these twelve men who changed the world.
- ✓ There were at least two sets of brothers:
 - ◆ Peter and Andrew
 - ◆ James and John (sons of Zebedee – also called “sons of thunder” by Jesus)
 - ✓ In all four New Testament lists of the twelve apostles, Peter is always named first.
 - ✓ The lists of apostles can be divided into three subgroups:
 - ◆ The first group includes Peter (Simon), Andrew, James, and John (the first group Jesus called).
 - ◆ The second includes Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas (the second group Jesus called).
 - ◆ The third includes James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, Judas and Judas Iscariot (the third/last group Jesus called).
 - ✓ Although the order within these groups vary, the first name in each group is always the same.
 - ✓ Typically, we know the most about the first group, less about the second group, and the least about the third group.
 - ✓ We know the personalities of the twelve apostles were very different from one another. For example:
 - ◆ **Peter** is typically the impulsive and aggressive leader (e.g., the time he cut off Malchus’ ear; Jn.18:10). He was the type of man who would act (or react) first and then ask questions later. He had no problem speaking up, but seemed to lack the ability to stay quiet. Eventually, God would refine and shape Peter’s personality into a person who would become a strong leader in the church and a faithful preacher of the Gospel.
 - ◆ **John** was almost the exact opposite of Peter. He appears to have been a quiet, loving and passive disciple. To make matters interesting, in the first twelve chapters of Acts we read of Peter and John working closely together during the early days of the church. They no doubt must have had to learn how to utilize one another’s strengths and strengthen one another in their weaknesses.
 - ◆ **Thomas** was clearly the most skeptical of the twelve (John 20:25), and perhaps the most pessimistic and cautious too. Yet, even though he is probably most known for doubting Jesus’ resurrection he may be the one who was most willing to be martyred for his faith in and loyalty to Jesus Christ (Jn.11:16).
 - ◆ **Simon** the Zealot’s very name indicates he was a radical Jewish revolutionary, dedicated to driving out the Roman oppressor. Before he met Christ he doubtlessly would have willingly plunged a knife into the heart of **Matthew** (the tax collector), a traitorous collaborator with Rome. But God turned Simon’s misdirected zeal for political vengeance into a zeal to preach the Gospel.
- What bound them together, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, was their love for and loyalty to Jesus Christ. This is true for all Christians and should be true in the church. Unfortunately, Christians look for a church where the people are like them (e.g., age, ethnicity, personality, background, social status). We tend to surround ourselves with people who are like us (and who like us) and avoid those who are different from or difficult for us. This is not how it should be in the church. The greatest bond that Christians share is their love for Jesus Christ, this transcends our personalities, ethnicities, and age. God is glorified by our unity in the midst of our diversity (Rom.10:12; 1Cor.12:4-27; Gal.3:26-29; Col.3:11).
- However, for the most part, there are several common factors that the apostles shared.

1. They were remarkably common

- As we study these twelve men, one thing perhaps stands out above the rest: these men were culturally and socially common. With the possible exception of Judas, none of these men would have stood out as being extremely wealthy or privileged, nor did any of them have any political or societal clout. They were twelve very ordinary men. They were from various backgrounds, regions, and occupations.
 - ✓ *“Simon, whom he named Peter”* (vs.14): Was a fisherman from Galilee, also called Cephas, Jesus changed his name to Peter (Jn.1:42);
 - ✓ *“Andrew his brother”* (vs.14): Was a fisherman from Galilee, with his brother Peter, and brought Peter to Jesus;
 - ✓ *“James”* (vs.14): The son of Zebedee, brother to John, was also a fisherman from Capernaum;
 - ✓ *“John”* (vs.14): The son of Zebedee, brother to James, was also a fisherman from Capernaum; identified himself as the disciple “whom Jesus loved”;
 - ✓ *“Philip”* (vs.14): Was from Bethsaida;
 - ✓ *“Bartholomew”* (vs.14): Was from Cana in Galilee; also known as Nathanael;
 - ✓ *“Matthew”* (vs.15): A tax collector in Capernaum; son of Alphaeus, also known as Levi or the publican;
 - ✓ *“Thomas”* (vs.15): Also called Didymus, possibly a fisherman, often remembered as “Doubting Thomas” (see Jn.20:25, 27-28; Matt.28:17);
 - ✓ *“James the son of Alphaeus”* (vs.15): Also known as *“James the younger”* (Mk.15:40);
 - ✓ *“Simon who was called the Zealot”* (vs.15): Was from Cana; the Zealots were Jewish revolutionaries who opposed Rome;
 - ✓ *“Judas the son of James”* (vs.16): Also known as Thaddaeus (Matt.10:3; Mk.3:18), and/or Lebbaeus, possibly due to the infamy that came to be attached to the name Judas;
 - ✓ *“Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor”* (vs.16): From Kerioth, and possibly the only Judean among the twelve, the one apostle who betrayed Jesus.
- The apostles were not celebrities, or even famous. They were not among the religious elite or viewed as super-spiritual. They were not socially popular and may have even been social outcasts.
 - ✓ Illust: “They were twelve perfectly ordinary, unexceptional men. But Christ's strategy for advancing His kingdom hinged on those twelve men rather than on the clamoring multitudes. He chose to work through the instrumentality of those few fallible individuals rather than advance His agenda through mob force, military might, personal popularity, or a public-relations campaign. From a human perspective, the future of the church and the long-term success of the gospel depended entirely on the faithfulness of that handful of disciples” (John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men*, p.2).
- Again, we must note the fact that God does not need us to be special – He wants us to be faithful (He is the One who makes us special)!

2. They were utterly fallible

- Even a casual study of the twelve apostles reveals that these men were not “stained glass saints.” For the Bible does not hide their faults nor does it glamorize their weaknesses. In the Gospels we find that at times Jesus corrected them, rebuked them, and was indignant with them. They were not perfect Christians, and as such they are very relatable to us.
 - ✓ At times they were impetuous and unspiritual:

Luke 9:21-22 ~ “And he strictly charged and commanded them to tell this to no one, ²²saying, ‘The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.’”

Mark 8:31-33 ~ “And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, ‘Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.’” (see Matt.16:21-26)

✓ At times they were prideful and argumentative:

Luke 9:46-48 ~ “An argument arose among them as to which of them was the greatest. ⁴⁷But Jesus, knowing the reasoning of their hearts, took a child and put him by his side ⁴⁸and said to them, ‘Whoever receives this child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. For he who is least among you all is the one who is great.’”

Mark 9:33-34 ~ “And they came to Capernaum. And when he was in the house he asked them, ‘What were you discussing on the way?’ ³⁴But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest.”

Luke 22:21-24 ~ “‘But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. ²²For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!’ ²³And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this. ²⁴A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.”

✓ At times they were unloving and harsh:

Luke 18:15-17 ~ “Now they were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. And when the disciples saw it, they rebuked them. ¹⁶But Jesus called them to him, saying, ‘Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God. ¹⁷Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.’”

Mark 10:13-14 ~ “And they were bringing children to him that he might touch them, and the disciples rebuked them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw it, he was indignant ...”

✓ At times they were self-serving and glory-seeking:

Mark 10:35-38, 41 ~ “And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, ‘Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.’ ³⁶And he said to them, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ ³⁷And they said to him, ‘Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.’ ... ⁴¹And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John.” (see Matt.20:20-28)

✓ At times they were overconfident and disloyal:

Luke 22:33-34 ~ “Peter said to him, ‘Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death.’ ³⁴Jesus said, ‘I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me.’”

Mark 14:27-31 ~ “And Jesus said to them, ‘You will all fall away, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’ ... ²⁹Peter said to him, ‘Even though they all fall away, I will not.’ ³⁰And Jesus said to him, ‘Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.’ ³¹But he said emphatically, ‘If I must die with you, I will not deny you.’ And they all said the same.”

Luke 22:60-61 ~ “But Peter said, ‘Man, I do not know what you are talking about.’ And immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. ⁶¹And the Lord turned and looked at Peter. And Peter remembered the saying of the Lord, how he had said to him, ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will deny me three times.’ ⁶²And he went out and wept bitterly.”

✓ At times they were weak and unreliable:

Luke 22:44-46 [at the Garden in Gethsemane] ~ “And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground. ⁴⁵And when he rose from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping for sorrow, ⁴⁶and he said to them, ‘Why are you sleeping? Rise and pray that you may not enter into temptation.’”

Mark 14:39-42 ~ “And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰And again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy, and they did not know what to answer him. ⁴¹And he came the third time and said to them, ‘Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? It is enough; the hour has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴²Rise, let us be going; see, my betrayer is at hand.’”

Matt 26:40 ~ “And he came to the disciples and found them sleeping. And he said to Peter, ‘So, could you not watch with me one hour?’”

✓ At times they were fearful and doubtful:

Luke 24:10-12 ~ “Now it was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women with them who told these things to the apostles, ¹¹but these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them.”

John 20:19 ~ “On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’”

John 20:26-27 ~ “Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, ‘Peace be with you.’” ²⁷Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’”

➤ Do you know why God uses fallible people? Because, when it comes to using humans, He has no choice! No one – other than the incarnate Christ – has ever lived an infallible life. The apostles were, like us, very human. But Jesus took these willing and faithful men, and – like a master artist molding a lump of clay – He fashioned, shaped, and created them to be His disciples. Scripture portrays the apostles as they were: weak and fallible men in the hands of an all-powerful and infallible God!

3. They were severely persecuted

➤ Jesus often forewarned His apostles (disciples) of the sufferings that they would endure as a consequence of following Him.

Luke 21:12-17 ~ “But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name’s sake. ¹³This will be your opportunity to bear witness. ¹⁴Settle it therefore in your minds not to meditate beforehand how to answer, ¹⁵for I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which none of your adversaries will be able to withstand or contradict. ¹⁶You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. ¹⁷You will be hated by all for my name’s sake.”

Matt 10:16-18 ~ “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. ¹⁷Beware of men, for they will deliver you over to courts and flog you in their synagogues, ¹⁸and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles.” (see Lk.10:3)

John 15:18-21 ~ “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. ²¹But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me.”

Acts 9:15-16 ~ “But the Lord said to [Ananias], ‘Go, for he [Paul] is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. ¹⁶For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.’”

- Of course, this is exactly what happened to the apostles. According to extra-biblical (historical) accounts, most of the twelve were martyred for their faith in and devotion to Christ (see “Foxe’s Book of Martyrs” (by John Foxe) and “Jesus Freaks” (by D.C. Talk and Voice of the Martyrs).
- ✓ **“Simon ... Peter”** (vs.14): Crucified upside down (by his request for he felt unworthy to die like his Lord), under Nero’s reign in Rome;
 - ✓ **“Andrew”** (vs.14): Crucified (bound, not nailed to a cross) in Achaia by a Roman governor after leading the governor’s wife to Christ;
 - ✓ **“James”** (vs.14): Beheaded, or stabbed to death with a sword, by Herod the king (Acts 12:1-3), the first Christian martyr;
 - ✓ **“John”** (vs.14): Died in Ephesus of old age after being banished to the island of Patmos (Rev.1:9) by the Roman Emperor Domitian (early tradition stated that he miraculously escaped from being boiled alive in a basin of oil);
 - ✓ **“Philip”** (vs.14): He was put to death by stoning at Heliopolis, in Phrygia (Asia Minor), eight years after the martyrdom of James. Before his death, multitudes came to Christ under his preaching;
 - ✓ **“Bartholomew”** (vs.14): There are differing accounts as to Bartholomew’s martyrdom. Some say he was tied up in a sack and cast into the sea, another says he was crucified;
 - ✓ **“Matthew”** (vs.15): The earliest traditions indicate that burned at the stake. Other traditions suggest that he was stoned to death or beheaded;
 - ✓ **“Thomas”** (vs.15): Most reliable tradition holds that Thomas was run through by a spear;
 - ✓ **“James the son of Alpheus”** (vs.15): He was stoned and beaten to death with clubs;
 - ✓ **“Simon ... the Zealot”** (vs.15): Martyred for faithfully preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ;
 - ✓ **“Judas the son of James”** (vs.16): Martyred after being beaten to death with clubs;
 - ✓ **“Judas Iscariot”** (vs.16): Suicide by hanging (Matt.27:3-6; Acts 1:15-20);
 - ✓ Apostle Paul: Was beheaded, under the authority of Nero, and buried in Rome.
- Not every Christian is called to be a martyr for Jesus Christ, but every Christian is called to be willing (if necessary) to be martyred for Jesus Christ! This is not a death wish, but a willingness to live and die for the glory of Christ. Suffering persecution for Christ is to be considered “normative” (not strange) for the Christian (see Matt.5:10-12; 1Cor.4:11-13; 2Cor.11:23-27; Heb.11:35-38; 1Pet.5:9-10).

Acts 14:22 ~ “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”

2 Tim 3:12-13 ~ “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

1 Peter 4:12 ~ “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.”

John 15:19-20 ~ “If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. ²⁰Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.” (see 1Jn.2:15-17)

4. They were resolutely faithful

- While clearly flawed the apostles were resolutely faithful. Through all the “ups” and “downs”, the trials and mistakes, the sacrifices and sufferings, the opposition and fears, the weaknesses and failings, every apostle (except for Judas) remained faithful to the Lord.

Luke 5:8-11 ~ “But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus’ knees, saying, ‘Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.’ ⁹For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, ¹⁰and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, ‘Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.’ ¹¹And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.”

Luke 18:28 [in response to the rich young ruler] ~ “And Peter said, ‘See, we have left our homes and followed you.’”

John 6:66-69 ~ “After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. ⁶⁷So Jesus said to the Twelve, ‘Do you want to go away as well?’ ⁶⁸Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, ⁶⁹and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.’”

John 11:16 ~ “So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, ‘Let us also go, that we may die with him.’” (Matt.26:35)

- The apostles were not perfect, but (with Judas as the only exception) they persevered in their faith – through hardships, oppositions, sorrows, and sufferings. Unfortunately, all too often, we can let trials and sins derail our faithfulness to Christ. We can turn a “slipup” into backsliding, or a trip into a fall. We must not let Satan win “the war” just because we lost a battle. “The fact that you have been knocked down is interesting, how long you stay down in important.”

5. They were supernaturally effective

- God literally used these twelve common, fallible, persecuted, and (with the exception of Judas) faithful men to change the world! After Christ’s resurrection and ascension, the apostles’ impact on Jerusalem was massive and remarkable.

Acts 4:1-14 ~ “And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ²greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand.

⁵On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, ‘By what power or by what name did you do this?’ ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead – by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹²And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.’ ¹³Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived [katalambanō] that they were uneducated [agrammatos], common [idiōtēs] men, they were astonished. And they recognized [epiginōskō] that they had been with Jesus.”

Acts 5:25-30 ~ “And someone came and told them, ‘Look! The men whom you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.’ ²⁶Then the captain with the officers went and brought them, but not by force, for they were afraid of being stoned by the people. ²⁷And when they had brought them, they set them before the council. And the high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, ‘We strictly charged you not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you intend to bring this man’s blood upon us. ²⁹But Peter and the apostles answered, ‘We must obey God rather than men.’”

Eph 2:19-22 ~ “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²²In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.” (see Eph.4:11-12; Matt.16:18-19; 1Cor.3:9-11; Rev.21:14)

Conclusion

- While there are not apostles today, every true Christian is a disciple of Christ. Like the apostles, most of us are remarkably common; we are utterly fallible; we are called to be willing to suffer persecution; we are called to be resolutely faithful; we are empowered to be supernaturally effective. As disciples of Christ, we are called to portray Christ and proclaim Christ to the world. We are called to know Christ, and to make Christ known!

Matt 28:16-20 ~ “Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted. ¹⁸And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’”

Acts 1:8 ~ “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (see Matt.5:14-16; 1Pet.3:15; Phil.2:14-16; Col.4:5-6; 1Pet.2:9)

- Again, God does not need you to be special, He wants you to be faithful. If we truly and humbly seek the Lord, He will use us to accomplish great things for His glory. By His sovereign and gracious will, God desires to use Christians to build His kingdom and edify His Church – to use the ordinary to accomplish the extraordinary!