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THE MASTER'S MEN & METHOD

Luke 6:12-19

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Luke Lesson 24

The Master's Men and Method
Luke 6:12-19

Do you ever look around at all the hurting, needy people in the world and feel overwhelmed? I do. Every day on the news we hear about people in desperate need: victims of war, disease, crime, poverty, family and personal problems. Even if we limit it to Flagstaff or to the people who attend this church, we encounter a pile of needs!

We all know that God is the only final answer to those needs. People need to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. God's people need to rely on His strength. God probably has many ways He could have used to dispense His truth to this hurting world. He could have used the angels who would have been more obedient and efficient at getting the job done than His followers have been. He could have spoken directly from heaven to every person on the globe. No doubt God had many other options. I can't tell you for sure why He chose to do it the way He did. But we know from our text and other Scriptures that ...

Jesus' method for ministry was prayerfully to choose a few men to minister to the needy masses.

The setting for Jesus' choosing the twelve apostles was the growing hostility against Him (6:12, "at this time"). Jesus knew that He would not always be with His followers (5:35), and so He spent the night alone on a mountain with God in prayer. The next morning He chose the twelve from among the larger number of His disciples. Then, Jesus descended to a place where a great multitude of needy people surrounded Him, eager to hear Him teach, to be healed of their diseases, and to be freed from the demonic forces that oppressed them. While verses 17-19 introduce the setting for the sermon that follows, they also tie in to the selection of the twelve. We see four things here: The needy *masses*; the powerful *Master*; the Master's *method* of selecting a few to minister to the many; and the *men* the Master selected.

1. The masses: Needy, hurting people.

Luke refers to both “a great multitude of His disciples” and “a great throng of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon” (6:17). The multitude of disciples would include all those who were following Jesus. The fact that the great throng had left their normal jobs or daily routines and had traveled on foot, some for great distances, to reach Jesus shows their extreme neediness. Their desperate situation is also pictured in 6:19, as they all try to touch Jesus, since “power was coming from Him and healing them all.” Some of these people had carried their loved ones to that place on donkeys or carts on rough, rutted roads. Most were Jews, but probably many of those from Tyre and Sidon were Gentiles who had heard of Jesus. But whoever they were and wherever they were from, their sense of great need had impelled them to overcome the difficulties and get to Jesus.

Wherever you go and whomever you encounter in this world, you can know that the person has great needs because the entire human race is under the curse of sin and death. God imposed suffering, hardship, and death as the curse on the human race because of Adam and Eve’s sin (Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 8:18-23). As those born under the curse of sin, we add to our misery by multiplying our own sins. As Job lamented, “Man is born for trouble as sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). The suffering, sickness, sorrow, and pain that we all encounter, along with the inevitability of death, should cause each of us to realize our own alienation from the holy God and our desperate need for reconciliation with Him before we die.

According to an old fable, a man made an unusual agreement with Death. He told the grim reaper that he would willingly accompany him when it came time to die, but only on one condition—that Death would send a messenger well in advance to warn him. The agreement was made. Weeks winged away into months, and months into years. Then one bitter winter evening as the man sat alone thinking about all his material possessions, Death suddenly entered the room and tapped him on the shoulder: “Time to go!” The man was startled and cried out in despair, “You’re here so soon and without warning! I thought we had an agreement.”

Death replied, “I’ve more than kept my part. I’ve sent you many messengers. Look at yourself in the mirror and you’ll

see some of them.” As the man complied, Death whispered, “Notice your hair! Once it was full and black, now it is thin and white. Look at how you cock your head to listen to my voice because you can’t hear very well. Observe how close you must get to the mirror in order to see yourself clearly. Feel the aches in your joints as you move around. Yes, I’ve sent many messengers through the years. I’ve kept my part. It’s too bad you aren’t ready, but it’s time for you to go.” (Story from “Our Daily Bread.”)

The inevitability of our own approaching death, not to mention the many other problems we all face, should show us our great need for the Lord Jesus. But, even if we recognize our great need and come to Jesus, we must be careful. Many of the people in this crowd just wanted to use Jesus to fix their problems so that they could get on with their own agendas. They did not want to follow Him as Savior and Lord. He was graciously healing them all and delivering them from demonic affliction. But if they remained in their sins and did not follow Jesus, their cure was only temporary, not eternal. They still had to die and face God’s judgment.

A few years ago, a couple came to the church I pastored in California. They made a profession of faith and went through the new believers’ class I taught. The wife had severe chronic back pain. Shortly after this, I learned that they were going to a “Science of Mind” cult, where apparently she had obtained some relief from her pain. When I talked to the husband about the spiritual dangers of that cult, he replied, “My wife has pain; we’re going to go anywhere where she can get relief.” They dropped out of the church.

But even if it had been Jesus who had given her relief, but she had not confessed her sinfulness and trusted in Christ as Savior, the outcome would be the same: she would still be alienated from God. So we dare not come to Jesus to fix our problems but not trust in Him as Savior and Lord. And we should not present Jesus to people as the One who can fix their temporary problems without warning them of the judgment to come. Needy people need to come to Jesus as the only Savior from sin and judgment.

2. The Master: Praying, choosing, and ministering.

Jesus is clearly the focal point of this passage. We see Him in private, praying to the Father; with His followers, choosing the twelve; and, in public, ministering to the needy mass of people.

- *The Master in private: Praying to the Father.* In light of the growing hostility and facing the need of selecting the twelve, Jesus went off to a mountain by Himself to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God. This is the only instance in the New Testament of someone spending the whole night in prayer. As the perfect Man, the Lord Jesus shows us how we as men and women should live in total dependence on the Father. Since Luke emphasizes Jesus as the Son of Man, he often shows us the importance of prayer in Jesus' life. When Jesus was baptized, He was praying (3:21). When His popularity was increasing, and multitudes were flocking to Him, Jesus "would often slip away to the wilderness and pray" (5:16). Just prior to Peter's confession, Jesus had been praying (9:18). It was observing Jesus praying that led the disciples to ask, "Lord, teach us to pray (11:1, 2). And, near the end, Jesus faced the prospect of Peter's denials and His own impending suffering on the cross through prayer (22:32, 41-45).

If our Lord was so aware of His need for communion with the Father, how much more should we be! Note, by the way, that Jesus had to get alone in order to pray. If we do not take the time to get alone with God, we will not be people of prayer. While we can and should pray even when we're in a crowd, we cannot pray as we should unless we get alone with God.

- *The Master with His own: Choosing the Twelve.* One of the main things Jesus was praying for that night on the mountain was the Father's guidance in the selection of the twelve apostles. These men would carry on His work after He was gone. Jesus would focus His time and effort on these men, teaching and training them for their mission. They in turn would teach and train others.

We don't know for sure why Jesus chose twelve, although it probably is linked to the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus was making visible His claim on the nation. He was showing that He was beginning a new people of God to contain the new wine of His kingdom. Jesus later would choose 70 others for a mission tour (Luke 10:1). Beyond these specially appointed ones, many were following

Him as disciples. But the twelve held a special place of importance. Jesus later told them that in His kingdom they would sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (22:30).

It is a mystery that although Jesus knew all things and prayed all night before choosing the twelve, He still chose Judas Iscariot. This is the mystery of the interplay between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. God determined before the foundation of the world that Judas, the son of perdition, would betray Jesus into the hands of sinners. And, yet, Judas was responsible for that terrible deed! Clearly, Jesus did not make a mistake in choosing Judas (John 6:70). He perished in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled (John 17:12). From this we can learn that even when we pray for God's guidance and seek His wisdom, sometimes the outcome is less than perfect because of the inscrutable sovereign plan of God. But we still must seek God's guidance and trust Him when the outcome is not what we had hoped for.

- *The Master in public: Ministering to the needy masses.* Jesus taught God's Word, He healed the sick, and He cast demons out of others. He is an inexhaustible supply of God's power, available to all who come to Him. All of Jesus' servants are like batteries—they get drained when people tap into them. They can only give so much without recharging. But Jesus is like the wall socket—the power just keeps on coming! Unlike a wall socket, you can plug into Jesus all the physical and spiritual needs of this great multitude, and He still was not overloaded. When Jesus sends us out to do His work, we dare not try to meet needs ourselves or we will quickly wear out. We can only point hurting people to the Master who has an inexhaustible supply of grace and power.

Thus we see the needy masses and the all-sufficient Master. Also, we see . . .

3. The method: The Master multiplying Himself through a chosen few to minister to the needy masses.

We'll look in a moment at the men Jesus chose. But for now, think about His method. He entrusted the entire kingdom program to these men. His method was to train them to train others. It was the principle of multiplying His work through others. As the apostle Paul told Timothy, "The things which you have heard

from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim. 2:2).

The task of proclaiming the gospel to the world's six billion people is daunting. But the principle of multiplication yields amazing results. You've heard examples like this: Suppose you had a choice of two jobs, each lasting 35 days. One pays \$1,000 a day; the other pays a penny the first day and doubles the amount each day. If you took the first job, you would earn \$35,000. But if you took the second job, you'd end up with \$171,798,717.84!

I realize that the process doesn't work perfectly with people. But if every Christian would not only lead one person each year to the Lord, but also train that person to reach one more, it wouldn't take long for billions to hear, assuming that we are crossing cultural and linguistic barriers. So our goal should not only be to win people to Christ, but to disciple them so that they will reach others who will reach still others. If you don't have a discipling mindset, you interrupt the process the Lord set in motion.

Thus we have the needy masses, the all-sufficient Master, and His method of multiplication. Finally, let's look at ...

4. The men: Common men from a variety of personalities and backgrounds.

It's amazing how common these men were! I doubt if any of us would have chosen them, had we been there at the time. None of them were educated in the rabbinic schools. None were a part of the influential Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. None were successful businessmen, unless you count the formerly crooked tax collector, Matthew. At least four were fishermen. We simply don't know much about many of the others.

There are four lists of the apostles: Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, here, and in Acts 1:13. The lists vary somewhat in order, but Peter is always first and Judas Iscariot is always last in the three synoptic gospel lists where he appears. Luke tells us Jesus named Simon "Peter," which means "rock." Except for Simon Peter in Luke 5:8, Luke has used the name Simon up to this point. After this, he uses Peter (except in 22:31 & 24:34). Peter's brother Andrew isn't mentioned often in Scripture, but every time we see him outside of the lists, he is bringing someone to Jesus. In fact, he

brought Peter to Jesus and then was content to take a back seat to his brother's leadership among the twelve. Although Peter was unstable and impulsive, he became the rock upon whose confession the church would be built. Though he failed Jesus by denying Him on the night of His betrayal, the Lord restored him and used him to win 3,000 converts on the Day of Pentecost.

James and John were brothers, and also cousins of Jesus. James was the first of the twelve to be martyred. John was the disciple Jesus especially loved, the one to whom Jesus from the cross entrusted the care of His mother. He became the author of the fourth Gospel, of the three Johannine Epistles, and of the Book of Revelation. Jesus called these brothers the sons of thunder, I think because of their fiery temperaments. But John became known as the apostle of love.

Philip was from the same town, Bethsaida, as Peter and Andrew. After Jesus found and called Philip, Philip found Nathanael, whom most think is the same as Bartholomew. The synoptics all link Philip and Bartholomew together. Philip seems to have been a bit slow to catch on to spiritual truth, but his slowness is for our benefit. In the upper room, he said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus gave the clear reply, "Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how do you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14:8, 9).

Bartholomew is probably Nathanael (of John 1:45-51; 21:2). The name Bartholomew means "son of Talmi," and thus was not his given name. The synoptic lists do not mention Nathanael, while John does not mention Bartholomew. In John 21:2, all the other men are apostles, and Nathanael is among them. Thus, it is likely that Bartholomew is Nathanael. All we know about him is recorded in the encounter between him and Jesus in John 1:45-51.

Matthew is the converted tax collector, Levi, author of the first Gospel (Luke 5:27-28; Matt. 9:9-17). Thomas, also called the Twin, is infamous for his doubting the resurrection (John 20:24-29). All we know about James the son of Alphaeus is his name. Most think that Simon the Zealot was a member of the radical political party that was known for its hatred of Rome, including those who collected taxes for Rome. I can't help but wonder if he and

Matthew exchanged some startled glances when Jesus picked them both! Most scholars identify Judas the son of James (Luke 6:16; Acts 1:13) as Thaddaeus (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18). All we know of him is that he asked Jesus a question in John 14:22. Last on the list is the infamous traitor, Judas. Iscariot probably is a family name stemming from his home region in Judea. If so, he is the only non-Galilean among the twelve.

Every Christian is a disciple of Jesus. The word means a learner and it especially referred to someone who attached himself to a teacher in order to acquire his wisdom and knowledge. With regard to Jesus, it implies faith in Him as the Savior and Messiah of Israel. It also implies abandoning our former way of living for ourselves and following Jesus and His teaching. The disciple is learning to be like Jesus, his teacher and Lord.

But only a few Christians were called as apostles in the formal sense of the word. It means one who is sent out under the authority of the sending one. The twelve apostles and Paul were given special authority to lay the foundation of the church. When the eleven apostles sought a replacement for Judas after his defection and death, they stipulated that he must be a man who had accompanied them during the whole time of Jesus' ministry and who was a witness of His resurrection (Acts 1:21, 22). In this restricted sense, of course, there are no apostles after the first century. No one today has authority over local churches in the same sense as the original apostles.

But in the sense of being "sent out ones," there are apostles today. We call them missionaries. They are sent out under the authority of the church to plant churches in other cultures. So the office of apostle as designating the twelve and Paul is no longer functional. But the gift of apostle in the sense of missionary is valid.

It is clear that the Lord sovereignly chose these twelve men for this office of apostle. It was His choice, not theirs. They did not volunteer; He conscripted them. While there will never be any others chosen to this high office, there is a principle here that applies to us all: The Holy Spirit sovereignly distributes spiritual gifts as He wills (1 Cor. 12:4-11). This means that He has gifted and called every believer into a sphere of service in the body of Christ.

You don't volunteer to serve Jesus; you are drafted! If you are a believer in Christ but you do not have a ministry mindset, where you are seeking to be used by God as He directs, you are a disobedient believer! Jesus did not save you so that you can sit around and be happy. He saved you to be His chosen instrument to testify to others of His grace and to build up the saints through the exercise of your gifts.

There is one other lesson we can apply from this list of the apostles. You don't have to be flashy or famous or influential in the worldly sense to be used by God. We all know about Peter, James, and John, but what do we know about James the son of Alphaeus, Simon the Zealot, or Judas the son of James? Not much! Nothing, really. And yet these men were a part of the twelve apostles who will sit on twelve thrones judging the tribes of Israel! Although they were not outwardly well known or influential as Peter was, they were faithful men who served according to their gifts. That's what God requires of you and me.

Conclusion

Let me ask, do you see the masses and their great needs? Are you burdened for them with compassion as Jesus was? If you feel overwhelmed by the great needs, then look to the all-sufficient Master, who has grace and power to spare. It's His job to heal and save them. But how does He do it? Through choosing faithful men and women to multiply His grace to others. He chooses common men and women from a variety of backgrounds and conscripts them into His service. If you've trusted in Him as Savior and Lord, He has appointed you to serve in His cause.

A familiar legend reports a conversation between Jesus and the angel Gabriel after the Lord's ascension back into heaven. They talked about what had happened down here—of Christ's birth, His life and ministry, His death and resurrection. Then Gabriel asked, "And how will the people of the world get to know about all of it?" Christ's reply was, "Well, I have a little company of friends there whom I have asked to publish it." "But what if, for any reason, they let you down and fail to do it?" Gabriel asked. Christ replied, "I have no other plan."

Discussion Questions

1. How can we know when to say no to needy people who make demands on us?
2. Should every Christian be involved in “discipling” others? What does this mean?
3. Agree/disagree: Every Christian is called to a ministry.
4. Why do so many Christians today burn out in ministry? Does the Bible address this problem? Where and how?

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