

THE CHOICE OF THE TWELVE DISCIPLES

Mk. 3:13 And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth [προσκαλέομαι ... πρὸς καλέω] unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. ¹⁴ And he ordained [ποιέω, *produced, prepared*] twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send [ἀποστέλλω] them forth to preach [κηρύσσω].

In every land Christianity has entered there are churches dedicated to the names of the disciples. Here in Kirkcaldy, for example, we have St. Andrew's, St. John's, and St. Peter's. In the estimation of men, these saints are typically elevated to somewhere just below Jesus ... but higher than the rest of us. The truth, however, is that each of the disciples of the Lord Jesus were ordinary men. We are not taking away from what they did for the Lord by simply stating they do not belong to a super-spiritual elite ... but, they are not divine, and neither are they always what every child of God should aspire to. They were not the most educated or the most privileged ... They were simply 'ordinary', and at the same time a very contrasting group of individuals.

... The majority of them were fishermen, - they would have been used to each other, with a similar work ethic and mindset ... although I could imagine James and John starting an argument in an empty boat! And the rest of them ...? They were also so different ... In fact, they didn't always work too well together! Indeed, you would have thought Jesus would have chosen twelve men who would have ideally complimented each other. After all, the same Jesus Who created all things in heaven, and in earth, *visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him (Col. 1:16)* ... you would have thought He would have picked a perfectly harmonious and euphonic band! But, nevertheless, these twelve disciples are what He chose!

Now, obviously He has a purpose in everything He does ... and He had a purpose in choosing each of these men to become His disciples. They were perfectly typical and ordinary in every way. ... Out of the side of your eye, take a peak around you and see the kind of people sitting beside you that God has called into His church ... and into this fellowship of the Lord Jesus. ... Look at the kind of people God saves. After all, He saved me! And not only is there a great surprise that He saved me, He saved you also!

There is none of us here that have made it onto the world's stage in any particular arena. We have done our best and worked our hardest but we belong to a simple little church meeting here in one of the streets in Kirkcaldy. Just like the disciples, we are perfectly 'ordinary' ... But do you know something? God *saves* ordinary people and He *even* uses ordinary people for here is what His Word says, *I Cor. 1:27 God hath chosen the foolish things of the world ... and God hath chosen the weak*

things of the world ... ²⁸ And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, *yea*, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: ²⁹ That no flesh should glory in his presence. ... And, just to emphasise, here is why He has done it the way He has ... ³⁰ But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

How many of the disciples were *outstanding* before Jesus called them? How many of them were worthy of His call? How many of them were preachers, or had witnessed miracles prior to entering the service of the Saviour? How many of them had previously travelled outside their own region? They didn't appear to have any spectacular intellectual talents. Most of them would have known how to 'de-bone' a fish ... but in the grand scheme of things, such knowledge would not have made a great impact on the world! Indeed, - also, - they had lapses in their faith, they were prone to making mistakes, they were fond of arguing and wanting their own way, and they often were slow learners ... 'a bit thick', even in spiritual issues! ... Actually, the more you think about them, you wonder what would make churches want to be called after them, or why they would have stained-glassed windows dedicated to them!

In these days when politics is very much to the fore in Scotland, one of the men Jesus chose belonged to a political independence party called the Zealots. They were a radical, political, movement determined to overthrow the Roman occupiers. Some of them belonged to an extremist group called the 'sicarii'. They were nicknamed the 'dagger-men' because they carried round little daggers in their cloaks, and when they would find a Roman soldier not paying attention to his security, they would murder him. ... Imagine choosing one of the Zealots to become a disciple! ... And imagine Jesus choosing someone like Matthew the tax-collector! In fact, what kind of a reputation must Jesus have been building for Himself keeping company with these people who He made into His disciples!

They had faults and flaws that wouldn't have taken too long to find *and yet* ... they carried on a ministry for Jesus, even after He had ascended into Heaven ... a ministry that totally turned the world upside down ... and we today are here as the consequence of their ministry, - their faithfulness to proclaim the Gospel to the uttermost ends of the earth, Mt. 28:19 *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: ²⁰ Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* ... Is that not amazing?! ... Yes, we are part of their legacy ... and what we are trying to do is to continue the work the Saviour they passed on through them to do! They were personally selected by Jesus in those early months of His public ministry. He identified who they were. ...

He chose them for the job. He called them particularly. He knew all about them, even before He appointed them as disciples. He was aware of their faults, - their quick tempers, their boasting, their ‘always wanting to have their own say’. ... He knew about Judas Iscariot, and yet He chose Him! ... Imagine a Prime Minister choosing a cabinet with individuals like these disciples! The government would be in disarray after their first meeting!

And when you think of it ... here were twelve *disparate*, contrasting, discordant, and most unlike ‘crew’ of individuals, ... and from a human perspective, the proclamation of the Gospel and the whole plan of the extension of the Kingdom of God depended upon them ... *and there was no Plan B!* This was it! That was God’s plan! They were responsible for the spread of the Gospel into every corner of the world! How could it be done? *It’s impossible!* And yet, Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, 2:19 *ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God;* ²⁰ *And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.*

Actually, when you read through the names of the disciples, and compare them with the other lists of names in the Gospels of Matthew, Luke, John, and also Acts chapter one, there are sometimes variations in their names, for, - a few times, - their ‘nicknames’ are used. For example, before Peter met Jesus, he was simply known as Simon ... also, it was Jesus who nicknamed James and John ‘Boanerges’, ‘sons of thunder’ ... Thaddaeus was another name for Lebbaeus (Mt. 10:3). So, there’s even a certain ‘ordinariness’ about the way some of the names of these men were compiled. They are not presented as icons to be turned into some special kind of consecrated ‘saints’ ... They were just ordinary, simple men Jesus chose to show the rest of us the people He uses in His service.

It might sound a strange question ... but, why were there *twelve* disciples? Why not more? Or, why did He call so many ... *any*, even?! He *could* have done it all Himself! But, since He *did* choose men, you would have thought the men He would have enlisted would have been the very best. You would have thought they would have been highly motivated for the task so as to benefit from the high level of training, for after all, the more Jesus could have intensely taught them the more He could have potentially achieved. ... Did He have a reason for choosing twelve? Yes, He did ... He has a reason and a purpose for everything He does.

A simple answer to the question, - which is only a part of the answer, - is that He chose twelve disciples to correspond to the twelve patriarchs in the Old Testament, - the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel. This would have made perfect sense from a Jewish perspective. The number ‘twelve’ was very special to them. ...

For example, Ex. 24:1 And he [God] said unto Moses, Come up unto the LORD, thou, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel; and worship ye afar off. ² And Moses alone shall come near the LORD: but they shall not come nigh; neither shall the people go up with him. ³ And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. ⁴ And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. Concerning the High Priest's breastplate, there were to be inserted twelve precious stones, 28:21 the stones shall be with the names of the children of Israel, twelve, according to their names, *like* the engravings of a signet; every one with his name shall they be according to the twelve tribes. Twelve men, - one from each tribe, - was sent to spy out the land of Canaan (Josh. 3:12). And when the children of Israel crossed the River Jordan, they piled up twelve stones, - one for each tribe, - as a memorial to God bringing them into the Promised Land (Joshua 4). ... And so, 'twelve' was a very special number that held great significance for the Jews. Indeed, the 'specialness' of the number is emphasised by the fact that when the demise of Judas Iscariot took place, the disciples, - who were *Jews*, and for whom the number 'twelve' was significant - very quickly restored the number by the appointment of Matthias (Acts 1:26).

But, is that all it the 'twelve' signified? Did Jesus choose twelve disciples simply to match the twelve patriarchs of Israel? What was going on? ... Let's try and think like a Jew so as to get to the heart of the matter as to why Jesus chose twelve disciples. ... You might ask, is it important whether He chose twelve, or twenty, or forty, or whatever?! Yes, it is important for everything Jesus did was important. Besides, did God have a purpose in choosing *you*? Of course, he did ... so then, He had a purpose as to why He chose *twelve* disciples.

One of the first actions Jesus took at the beginning of His public ministry is described in Jn. 2, ¹³ And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, ¹⁴ And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: ¹⁵ And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; ¹⁶ And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. He also took the same action near the end of His ministry, Mt. 21:12 And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, ¹³ And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. *Here* was the problem He was dealing with ...

Basically, the people were being led further and further away from God by these apostate Jewish clerics ... and as a consequence, Christ brought a promise of judgment them and their temple, *There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down* (Mt. 24:2). And in 70AD the temple *was* destroyed, the city ransacked, and the people scattered throughout the nations. ... It was no less than Christ's judgment required, and their wickedness was even added to when they rejected Pontius Pilate to set Jesus free, Mt. 27:21 *The governor answered and said unto them, Whether of the twain will ye that I release unto you? They said, Barabbas.* ²² *Pilate saith unto them, What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.* ²³ *And the governor said, Why, what evil hath he done? But they cried out the more, saying, Let him be crucified.* ²⁴ *When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it.* ²⁵ *Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.* ... Even before God condemned them formally, they had condemned themselves! ... And *who* did they belong to? They belonged to the twelve tribes of Israel ... stretching back through the centuries to Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham.

Now, let's return to Mark chapter three to see how this all fits in with why Jesus chose *twelve* disciples ... The Pharisees and the Herodians were determined to destroy Him (v.6); the Sadducees also wanted Him dead ... He had all the rulers and influential people against Him! ... "He is satanic! He is demonic! He is possessed by Beelzebub" ... That's what they were saying.

When Jesus heard it, He confronted their claims, Mk. 3:28 *All sins shall be forgiven unto the sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme:* ²⁹ *But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation.* ... What does that mean? Already, in the opening chapters of the Gospel, the Father and the Holy Spirit confirmed Jesus to be God ... and here are these enemies of Christ accusing Him of belonging to the devil, indeed, that *He* was a devil. To say Jesus was satanic was to *blaspheme* and contradict the testimony of the Holy Spirit, - they were rejecting the truth of the Holy Spirit. Basically, they were saying the Holy Spirit was *wrong* ... and that is unforgiveable for if you make a wrong decision about the Godhood and deity of Jesus Christ, you are telling God He doesn't know what He is talking about! And as far as God is concerned, He is jealous for His Son ... so jealous that the person who condemns Jesus as a pretender, a fraud, and an imposter is themselves *condemned!* It is as serious as that! If you reject Jesus Christ, you reject the truth of God the Holy Spirit ... for it is the Holy Spirit Who imparts the truth to us. And by rejecting the Holy Spirit, you have condemned yourself!

And so, these leaders had made the wrong conclusions about Jesus and they were heading for judgment because they had blasphemed against the Holy Spirit, and condemned themselves, - the Holy Spirit was showing them this was Jesus, but they would not accept it! The Pharisees had concluded the opposite of the truth. Jesus is not of God, they said, He is of the devil! ... There was something else they did ... Through their opposition to Jesus, they had disqualified themselves from being proper leaders of Israel, because God had intended proper leaders of Israel with the responsibility to be faithful and obedient followers of God ... and they weren't! And since they didn't follow what God was showing them through His Son, - [Jn. 1:11 He came unto his own, and his own received him not.](#), - God rejected them, and they had no more place in His plan! They were ostracised, abandoned, cut adrift ... and estranged from Jehovah.

And a few years later, - just prior to His arrest and crucifixion, - Jesus continued His condemnation of these religious clerics, [Mt. 23:27 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.](#) ²⁸ Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. ... Spiritually, they were dead men walking! The old regime they stood for was 'on its last legs'. Their corruption, - that had been eating away at their religion, - had caught up with them, and was condemning them. Their corruption had been a spiritual disease polluting the nation for centuries. It was what the prophets, - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Hosea, and the rest, - had contended against ... but there was no change taking place in the people.

Does this mean, then, that God turned His love and commitment away from Israel altogether? Does this mean He went back on His word to Abraham in [Gen. 12:2, I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing](#) ... No, God did not go back on His word for that is one thing He cannot do. The covenant with Abraham remains intact, - even to this very day, - but yet Jesus was establishing *His* Kingdom as a judgment on these corrupt rulers who came from those twelve tribes of Israel. What He was setting up was *taking over* from what had gone before. He said to His disciples, [Lk. 22:28 Ye \[i.e. the 'twelve'\] are they which have continued with me in my temptations.](#) ²⁹ And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; ³⁰ That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

And notice how each of the twelve disciples were Jews, - not Gentiles ... That clearly shows how the Gentiles haven't replaced the Jews. If that had been the case Jesus could 'put Calvary on hold' for a while and gone into the northern

Gentile territories of Tyre and Sidon and chosen disciples from *non*-Jews, but He didn't ... He could have made the Roman centurion a disciple, but He didn't! There were plenty of Gentiles He could have brought into His band of disciples ... but that was not the way His Father had planned it in eternity.

Some theologians say the Church has removed God's plan for the Jewish nation, and *we* are the 'new Israel' ... But that is not the way Jesus said it would be! He looked ahead and He prophesied to these twelve Jewish disciples, *ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*. It cannot be any clearer than that!

Now, we notice this hasn't happened yet, so it must be still in the future. *When* is it going to happen? In the Song of the Redeemed, - gathered round the throne, - we're told the answer, Rev. 5:9 *And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; ¹⁰ And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and **we shall reign on the earth***.

... That is when Jesus returns ... to this earth. Ezekiel records, Ezek. 43:1 *Afterward he brought me to the gate, *even* the gate that looketh toward the east: ² And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice *was* like a noise of many waters: and **the earth** shined with his glory... ⁴ And the glory of the LORD came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect *is* toward the east. ⁵ So the spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and, behold, the glory of the LORD filled the house. ... What house? Where is the house to be located? Is. 2:2 *And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. ³ And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from **Jerusalem**. ... That's the day when Jesus told His disciples they would sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Lk. 22:30). ... That is the promise He has made, so He will keep His word! And that is the confidence God's people are trusting in!**

So, you see, this is why there were *twelve* apostles, because they constitute the establishment by Christ of the new spiritual leadership of Israel. The Jewish leaders were no longer the spiritual leaders ... for as far as Christ was concerned the twelve disciples had taken over from them. This was the New Covenant, and this was why He set up the Twelve, and it was them Who would share in His Kingdom, Is. 2:4 *And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people:*

and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. ... And here in Mark chapter three He called out and ordained these Twelve to establish righteousness and justice, to replace the corruption of the Pharisees, the scribes, the Sadducees, the rabbis, and the priests of the old system.

Therefore, you and I do not belong to the old covenant, - the old system, - for we belong to the new. The new is built upon the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, - the blood He shed to redeem your soul ... That is how He has saved you, and that is how you belong to the new covenant. The writer to the Hebrews captures what has happened, 7:19 the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope *did*; by the which we draw nigh unto God. ... ²⁶ For such an high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; ²⁷ Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. ²⁸ For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, *maketh* the Son, who is consecrated [*τελειόω*, *completely perfected*] for evermore.

In other words, the old religion, - not the people, but the religion, - of Judaism is set aside and replaced by the Gospel of Grace. ... And here is the plan ... Mk. 3:13 He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth *unto him* whom he would: and they came unto him. ¹⁴ And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him ... That is the work of a King! He is establishing His Kingdom. And that was what Jesus was doing when He called each of those twelve men to Himself, and each of them fulfilled their purpose in His plan ... even Judas Iscariot.

What are we seeing here that we can take away with us to and strengthen our faith? Surely it is this ... God's hand is steering the course that will ultimately bring all His plans to fruition, to His glory. And what is perfect for Him is perfect for us! He is directing it all for there is nothing outside of His control. Yes, Jesus was being confronted by the enemy, but His Father remained in charge ... as the Saviour Himself was willing to pray, *Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven* (Mt. 6:10).

There were only twelve men ... twelve ordinary men ... but chosen of God, and called. They were set apart unto the service of the Master ... Called, Chosen, Commissioned, - selected, set apart, and sent ... "All that I am I owe to Thee, Thy wisdom, Lord, has fashioned me; I give my Maker thankful praise, Whose wondrous works my soul amaze" ... That is what we are saved for! May we be faithful unto our calling! Amen.