

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for the truth of Your Gospel. We marvel at the wonder of Your love, offered to all who will receive it; we rejoice at the amazing love You have showed in releasing us from sin; we delight in the gifts of Your Holy Spirit and the assurance of our salvation, and we anticipate with joy the feast of heaven when You come again in glory. Lord Jesus Christ, we praise You for the power of Your Gospel: AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Look at a map of the region around where you live, and let this prompt your prayers for people and places

On-going prayers

- **Pray for the courts of justice:** *Pray for defence counsel, who have the job of protecting the public from false or malevolent prosecution*
- *Give thanks to God for the air you breathe, and pray for those who suffer from pollution*
- *Pray for those who work in the building trade, especially small builders who rely on the domestic market for house improvement*

Meditation

Who will deliver us from evil's allies,
From those who try to halt the work of God within our world?

Who will deliver us from false belief,
From those who peddle religion instead of the love of God?

Who will deliver us from lying tongues,
From those who lead the church astray by devious words?

Who will deliver us from lovers of war,
From those who choose to fight instead of work for what is best?

Who will deliver us from false accounting,
From those who use words and numbers to deceive the faithful?

Who will deliver us from ignorance of sin,
From those who prefer to judge themselves than trust the Word?

Who will make us wise to Satan's ways,
But Christ, who gives us wisdom's eyes, revealing truth eternal.

Bible passage - Luke 6:12-19

¹² Now around then, Jesus went away to the mountain to pray and he spent the night in prayer with God. ¹³ When morning came, he called his disciples. He chose twelve of them and gave them the name 'apostles':

¹⁴ Simon (whom he named Peter),
Andrew (Peter's brother),
James,
John,
Philip,
Bartholomew,
¹⁵ Matthew,

Thomas,
James (son of Alphaeus),
Simon (called the Zealot),
¹⁶ Judas (son of James),
and Judas Iscariot, the one who became a traitor.

¹⁷ Jesus came down with them and took up His position on a level place. A large crowd of His disciples was there and a great crowd of people from all over Judea, Jerusalem, and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon. ¹⁸ They had come to hear Him and be healed of their diseases. Those who were troubled by evil spirits were being cured, ¹⁹ and everyone in the crowd tried to touch Him because power came out from Him and healed them all.

Bible Study

Review

Today's passage appears to be a simple and factual piece of Scripture, but it is a significant turning point in Luke's Gospel. After telling us about Jesus' work in the previous chapters, Luke now changes tack and chapters 6 and 7 describe significant amounts of teaching. But before beginning this, he tells us that Jesus prayerfully choose a small group of His followers for a special role, and called them 'Apostles'.

The list of apostles is similar to that found in Matt 10:1-4 and Mark 3:23-29, though there are some differences. The list appears at a different point in each Gospel. Luke names the twelve just before Jesus begins His teaching ministry, Mark lists them within his general description of Jesus' ministry (Mark 3), and Matthew names them just before giving instructions for mission (Matthew 10). In addition, some of the names in Luke's list are different from those in Matthew and Mark, but the differences are minor.

Here in Luke, Jesus had burst onto the scene in Nazareth and Capernaum and created a stir. People began to think that He was the Messiah, and as a result, some were aghast (the Pharisees). Others began to follow Jesus, and all who did so were called 'disciples'. A disciple is defined firstly as a follower and secondly as a learner. Jesus' disciples both followed Him and learned from Him, and they consequently learned about God and His kingdom.

We have already met some of the apostles named in this passage. Simon Peter, James, John and Andrew had been found by Jesus earlier on (5:1-11), and Levi had only recently responded to His call. Yet before they were named apostles, they were no more than individuals amongst a large number of followers.

On a number of occasions, Luke reports that Jesus prayed before important events (9:8, 11:1, 22:40f. etc.), and He did so here. After prayer, Jesus chose these five disciples and seven others, and they formed a wide ranging group of individuals. The first four were fishermen, the next was Levi, a professional man, and the others included a radical, Simon the zealot, and also an intellectual (that is, if Bartholomew is the same person as Nathaniel in John's Gospel - John 1:45).

Why did Jesus choose twelve people to be apostles? It is highly likely that He did so to symbolise the creation of a new People of God. The old nation of Israel was constituted from twelve tribes, and so Jesus' choice of these twelve was a bold statement of intent. They were the pioneers of the new people of God, advancing His new Kingdom, already announced by Jesus in word and deed.

The twelve Apostles continue to be famous to this day. By following Jesus through the three years of his ministry, they are the primary witnesses to His life, work, death and resurrection. It is worth remembering, however, that we know little about most of them. Matthew wrote a Gospel, John did the same, and Peter became the head of the Church. The early church did not leave us with information about the work of most of the apostles after Jesus resurrection, and only a few stories have survived, for example, about Thomas (John 20:24f.) and Philip (Acts 8:26f.).

Nevertheless, it is good to know that Jesus lived and worked with this small group of people. Most of what we know about them is to do with how they responded as a group to Jesus and His ministry. A great deal of Jesus' teaching came about because of their questioning or because of what happened as they were travelling with Jesus. They became crucial to God's work on earth through Jesus.

It is significant therefore that after choosing the twelve, Jesus was ready to teach. Verse 17 describes Jesus taking up his stand at a place where crowds could hear Him teach, and we will read more of this teaching in coming days. Our passage finishes with Luke reminding us of everything Jesus had done to demonstrate the Kingdom of God in His ministry to date (6:18,19). His signs and wonders had demonstrated God's love, and the people gathered in their droves to receive God's blessing through Jesus (6:18,19).

Going Deeper

The Bible study goes deeper to look at these issues:

- *The Mission of Jesus and the Kingdom of God*
- *The consequences of God's choice*
- *The characteristics of an apostle*

Notes on the text and translation

V12 'in prayer with God'

Other translations:

'praying to God' (NIV)

'in prayer to God' (NSRV)

Nearly all the translations describe Jesus as praying 'to' God. It is quite possible, however, to translate the Greek phrase as *'prayer with God'*. This gives us a clearer picture of Jesus' communion with His father, and in my view, it is preferable to the phrase 'praying to God'.

V17 'took up His position'

Most Bible versions simply state that Jesus 'stood' on a level place. The Greek word is 'istemi', which can be translated in a number of different ways, but is often used in scripture for taking up some position (e.g. when the Messiah is said to 'stand' on Mount Zion). Jesus is setting out to take a formal position for teaching (as the coming verses of Luke 6 indicate), so I think it appropriate to speak of Jesus taking up an appropriate position for this.

V18 'Those who were troubled by evil spirits were being cured'

Other translations:

'and those who are troubled with unclean spirits were cured' (NRSV)

'as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. and they will heal.' (NKJV)

Because of the way that verses have been assigned, most translators try to make this phrase part of the same sentence as the first part of the verse. However, the tense of the verb is quite different from that in the first half of the verse. For this reason, I suggest that it makes sense if it leads into the next verse. If you read through my translation, you will see how this phrase works to lead into the last verse of our reading.

Going Deeper

The Mission of Jesus and the Kingdom of God

The mission of Jesus was to establish the kingdom of God. Each of the gospel writers has a different way of explaining how Jesus went about that task, and we should not be surprised to find differences between Luke and the other Gospels. In Luke's Gospel, the time had come when Jesus needed a small group of people who would remain with Him throughout his ministry.

As we have seen, his choice of twelve individuals illustrates His intention to establish God's new people within His kingdom, but it does more than that. The name 'apostle' is fascinating because it means 'one who is sent.' It is hard to think of much that the disciple did when Jesus was alive to justify this name. The name looks forward to a time, after Jesus is resurrection, when the disciples would have a job to do far beyond anything they could have imagined when they were first called. It points to the time when God required the message of His Kingdom to be spread throughout the whole world. The apostles were to be the first of Christ's disciples to take the message of God's love to all people.

It is also not surprising that Luke saw fit to add to the story of the summoning of the twelve by summarising Jesus' ministry. The kingdom of God was to be the place where the evils of suffering and ill health were broken down, and Jesus demonstrated this through his healing and deliverance ministry. The apostles were not called to found churches, that is, to start a new religious institution. They were called to show in word and deed that God's love could break down barriers here on earth. Healing still remains an essential part of the ministry of God's people, as does deliverance from evil. The church of God cannot afford to ignore its fundamental call.

The consequences of God's choice

The subject of 'choice' is important throughout the Bible. Clearly, there were many disciples following Jesus at the time He chose the twelve, and we must face the fact that out of His many followers, Jesus chose only a certain number of people to have a special role as apostles. Did Jesus choose this twelve simply to be His special close friends, or because they had special talents and gifts that He would be able to use?

Certainly, there is strong evidence from within the Bible and outside of it that some of the apostles (such as Peter and John) became towering figures of spiritual importance within the early church, and they have left a considerable impression upon the history of humanity. But there is absolutely nothing within the Gospels to suggest that God could not have done something similar through His choice of any other individuals.

Millennia before, God had chosen Abraham out of all the peoples of the Earth, to begin His work of salvation in the world. God's choices have always been something of a mystery, and we look at them with awe. His choice is not based upon people's merits, but upon His intention to do His will on earth. His choices are always a matter of His eternal plan for the world. No human being can ever fully understand God's purposes, so neither can they pretend that they know any better how He makes His choices.

God chooses individuals according to His need to do special work at special times in special places, but there is no merit in heaven for anyone who has been chosen for a special task. The only merit any individual can claim before God is the faith by which they were saved, and that comes only by the grace of Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. Any man or woman can claim such faith, of course, but those who have been called to special tasks have no glamour or status in heaven, even the apostles. They, together with all the greats of Christian history and leaders of the church, simply bear the responsibility of being accountable for what they have been called to do before God's throne of grace.

No man or woman would be wise, therefore, to seek a special call of God. The Lord will call people to do His will according to His own purposes, and the duty of true disciples is not to ape God's authority and put themselves forward; as if they can govern God's work on earth better than He does. Their duty is to be ready to hear His call and respond to it.

The list of the apostles

It is worth looking at the three Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, and looking at the lists of the twelve provided by each. The lists are similar, but we would be wise to be familiar with their differences, and understand them.

LUKE	MATTHEW	MARK
Simon	Simon	Simon
Andrew	Andrew	Andrew
James,	James	James
John,	John	John
Philip,	Philip	Philip
Bartholomew,	Bartholomew	Bartholomew
Matthew,	Thomas	Matthew
Thomas,	Matthew	Thomas
James (so Alphaeus),	James (so Alphaeus)	James (so Alphaeus)
Simon (the Zealot),	Thadaeus	Thadaeus
Judas (so James),	Simon (cananean)	Simon (cananean)
and Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot	Judas Iscariot

These three lists are broadly similar. There is no single list of disciples within John's Gospel to compare with these, and there is no reason to suppose that John knew anything different about the twelve. His gospel does help us in one way, however. Most of the names appear to be paired. You can see this in the way that the gospel writers speak about James and John (Matt 4:21 Luke 9:28), Simon and Andrew (Mark 1:16, John 1:4), Philip and Bartholomew, and Matthew and Thomas (Matt 10:3, Mark 3:18). These pairings seem consistent and may have reflected genuine friendships.

The figure of Bartholomew is a little controversial, however, because church tradition suggests that he is the same as Nathaniel in John's Gospel. If we look in John 1, we will find the story in which Jesus meets Nathaniel, who is introduced to Jesus by Philip. He seems to be an intellectual, and with Bartholomew not being mentioned in John's Gospel, some have assumed that this is the same person. Such things can never be known for sure, but we can sometimes be reasonably confident of a good assumption, especially if it has historical validity.

There are two other differences between the list of names found in Luke's Gospel, and those found in Matthew and Mark. In Luke's Gospel, the names of Matthew and Thomas appear in a different order to that found in the Gospel of Matthew, which is the same as that found in Mark. It may be that Matthew changed

the order; after all, he was the writer of his own gospel! Lastly, Luke appears to have omitted the name Thaddeus (as found in Matthew and Mark), and included another Judas, being the son of James, not Judas Iscariot. Generations of Christians have simply concluded that Judas (son of James and Thaddeus are in fact the same person.

In the light of our discussion of God's choice and what it means to be an apostle, it is probably unwise for us to spend too much time trying to delve into these details. We should not be interested so much in those called by God to the special task of apostleship, rather that God chose to work in this way to establish His Kingdom and to assist Jesus. This was also God's way of preparing His people for the task ahead, that lay beyond Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus' choices had eternal consequences.

Application

Today, the Church of God is heavily dependent upon the leadership of people who have titles and status. Bishops have power and authority, priests, pastors, ministers and church leaders are encouraged to take higher degrees, perhaps doctorates, if they wish to be highly regarded. But in the light of what we have read today in God's Word, this must surely be questioned. Surely, the leadership of God's people within His kingdom is a matter of call and not special privilege. Those who are called must be properly trained and supported for the ministry, but their place in the kingdom of God is no higher than any other disciple.

These principles do not come simply from this passage of Scripture, they come from all of Jesus' teaching. We will know that revival has come upon us when the most talented, inspired or intelligent of people do not feel they are called to lord it over everyone else by assuming that they are the best church leaders. They do not serve God's people by creating titles for themselves, asking for money on television, or creating gaudy garments with which to parade their status. God's Kingdom is not advanced merely by the creation of 'house churches', 'bishoprics', or 'apostolates' or any reorganised church structures. These things are sometimes necessary, but God's purposes are pursued when all His disciples follow Him with determination and integrity, led by those who spurn the things of this world and aspire to spiritual holiness.

The list of the twelve Apostles is found at a significant point in Luke's Gospel. Jesus had already begun the work of the kingdom of God, and His choice indicates His desire to continue that work for ever. We should remember that the work Jesus eventually gave his twelve Apostles now falls upon all the church today. Not everyone is an 'apostle', not everyone is a 'minister', not everyone is a 'pastor', not everyone is a 'preacher', not everyone holds office within the church, but all have their place in God's order as a disciple. He has a role for each of us within His plans, and it is crucial that we understand our calling and do His will.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What do you think is the difference between an apostle and a disciple?
2. Who are the apostles in our own day and age, what is their call, and in your opinion, are they doing what they are called to do.
3. Luke describes the signs that accompany God's kingdom as healing and deliverance. What signs accompany the church today.

Personal comments by author

It is very challenging to read what the Bible has to say about the Apostles. We tend to place them on pedestals, but they were ordinary people given a special task. I long for the day when God's people will organise the church in a way that reflects the Biblical example, and accept leaders who demonstrate the primary apostolic gifts of chosen-ness, humility, and desire to learn of God. Of course, things are more complex in today's world, but is the example of the apostles not for our guidance?

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Think about the manner in which your own church is led. You will no doubt feel some allegiance to it. Assess carefully whether it reflects what we know about God's purpose for His church and the leadership of the apostles.*
- *Take the opportunity to research the internet to find out more about the twelve apostles. Be careful only to accept evidence that is provable and reasonable*

Final Prayer

Lord God, You have guided Your people throughout two millennia of human history, and you perceive the truth of our circumstances more fully than anyone can do today. Inspire Your people therefore to live by Your Word and work by Your guidance, and therefore be successful in demonstrating Your Kingdom rule on earth. This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN
