

I Have Not Come to Call the Righteous  
Luke 5:1-11, 5:27-32, 6:12-16  
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Read Luke 5:1-11, 5:27-32, 6:12-16

*“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*  
(Hebrews 4:12)

## **Introduction**

“Dear Jesus,

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for managerial positions in your new organization. All of them have now taken our battery of tests; and we have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant... It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. They do not have the team concept. We would recommend that you continue your search for persons of experience in managerial ability and proven capability.

Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper. Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership. The two brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, place personal interest above company loyalty. Thomas demonstrates a questioning attitude that would tend to undermine morale. We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Better Business Bureau; James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical leanings, and they both registered a high score on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind, and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated, ambitious, and responsible. We recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller and right-hand man.

All of the other profiles are self-explanatory. We wish you every success in your new venture. Sincerely, Jordan Management Consultants”<sup>1</sup>

We find ourselves a few chapters into the Gospel of Luke where Jesus had come to the place in His ministry where He would be singling out a smaller group of His followers to be His twelve apostles. As the fictional, satirical letter above written by an author named Tim Hansel shows, His choices weren't the most conventional or logical. Most of us probably would have recommended more educated, more spiritually mature and respectable men to form His inner circle. After all, they would be entrusted with the future of the church and the growth of the kingdom of God following Jesus' ascent into heaven. But as we'll see in this passage, Jesus' choices were prayerful and intentional, and the growth of the Christian church testifies to the Apostles' eventual effectiveness.

We meet the first trio of Apostles in their fishing boats:

### **I. From Catching Fish to Catching Men (5:1-11)**

*<sup>1</sup> On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put*

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Hansel, *Eating Problems for Breakfast* (Waco: Word, 1988), pp. 194-5.

out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch." <sup>5</sup> And Simon answered, "Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets." <sup>6</sup> And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. <sup>7</sup> They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and 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." <sup>11</sup> And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

This is a really fascinating story because it starts as being about one group of people, but turns out to be about another group entirely. It starts as a story of Jesus preaching to the crowd, and how they were just a little too aggressive, He was getting backed into the lake. So He got on a boat, which happened to belong to this guy named Simon Peter. And He preached from the boat, which maybe gave Him a better view and acoustics. And you'd think that the focus would be about what He was preaching and how the crowd reacted. But the scene shifts, and Jesus' real attention focuses on three fishermen.

Michael Card reminds us that "*if you want to amaze a fisherman, a tremendous catch is the proper way to do it.*"<sup>2</sup> In verse 4, Jesus told Peter to take the boats out in the deep and cast the nets again, knowing they had failed to catch anything overnight. If these stories that Luke records are in chronological order (and they might not be), then Jesus has already healed Peter's mother-in-law, so there is a relationship there where Peter would trust Him more than just some random carpenter and preacher who was giving fishermen advice. That would be like me telling John how to run his flooring business or telling Chris how to fix houses. I think they'd look at me and gently (or not so gently) tell me to "stay in my lane," right?

So Peter is a little skeptical and maybe a little offended that Jesus has told him to put his nets down – "we've been trying to catch fish all night with little success, and now you want us to try to catch some when it's a much worse time to fish? OK, we'll do it, but only because You're the One asking." You can probably sense Peter has zero expectation of catching anything and is trying to figure out how to be gracious about it. But he calls Jesus "Master," so he respects His position. I'm pretty sure he was not expecting to catch so many fish that his nets would break. Verse 7 says it wasn't just the nets that were breaking, but there were so many fish that both boats started to sink when they were loaded onto them.

I'm not sure I would have had the same reaction to Jesus that Peter did. I think I would have been extremely grateful, thanked Him profusely, and assured Him that I would split the profit from selling the fish with Him. And anytime He wanted to join us fishing in the future, He was more than welcome. "We'll literally save you a seat, Jesus, we'll get your name printed on it and everything." But Peter was so floored at this catch of fish that he knew could never "just happen" that his response was to fall at Jesus' feet and declare his unworthiness and sinfulness. He went from calling Him "Master" to "Lord" because he sensed that only God could produce this kind of miracle. Why would he tell Jesus to "*depart from me*"? That seems rude. But this is the response of humans when they realize they are in the presence of God's glory and holiness – it's what Isaiah said when

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<sup>2</sup> Michael Card, *Luke: The Gospel of Amazement* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2011), p. 76.

he saw the Lord— *“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips”* (Isaiah 6:5). Peter’s response is from someone who has had the presence of God revealed to him by the Holy Spirit and feels the full weight of His glory, which in turn reveals his own unworthiness.

Peter didn’t know it, but his fishing days were over. Not only will Jesus not depart from him, but He’ll invite Peter and his fishing buddies, James and John, to join Him in His ministry travels. *“From now on you will be catching men,”* or “you will be fishers of men” as some translations have it. The gospel would be the bait or the net that would bring people into the kingdom. This huge catch of fish is a foreshadowing of what would happen on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, where Peter would preach and 3,000 people would come to faith in Christ. It wouldn’t always be that spectacular, some days of fishing just produce one or two catches, just like ministry sometimes produces small results. But other times the Lord works miracles. We are called to be fishers of men, too. How do we do that? By making friends with the unchurched, by inviting them to worship or a Bible study, by finding opportunities to care for people’s physical needs, to care about them as people, and using those friendship to tell them about the Lord, by using whatever your vocation is to be salt and light, by supporting ministries locally and around the world. That’s our individual and corporate calling.

Another way to apply this is that maybe you’re like Peter and Jesus is asking you to do something that you’re highly skeptical about. Something that sounds unreasonable or unhelpful. What do I mean? Maybe the command to give to the Lord’s work, to tithe. Or the command to forgive or to only marry a Christian.<sup>3</sup> Jesus may be asking us to be obedient to Him, to put down our nets once again when we don’t think there’s any reward there for us. You may get a huge result, like the big catch of fish. But more likely, you won’t. Your efforts may not see the fruit of your labors for years, maybe decades, but Galatians 6:9 says, *“Let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up.”* Trust Jesus when He asks you to do something, which is the same thing as saying, “trust the Scriptures when they command you to live a certain way.”

The next Apostle in Jesus’ round-up is a man sitting at his tax booth.

## **II. From Collecting Taxes to Following Jesus (5:27-32)**

*27 After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, “Follow me.” 28 And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. 29 And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them. 30 And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” 31 And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”*

Imagine that you have been audited by the IRS and they assign one of their agents to your case. They freeze your assets, they put your life and your finances under a microscope so that they can decide whether you have cheated on your taxes or not. And then imagine that this agent finds a way to extort extra money from you. Your anger was already pretty high at being targeted by the government, but now it’s personal and you do not like this man. Now, imagine this man has been selected by Jesus to be one of His closest associates for His years of ministry. And that years later, this man would write a biography of Jesus that would open the New Testament. Introducing Levi! Levi, of course, is better known to us as Matthew, the author of the First Gospel. Most people assume that he had met Jesus previously to be so readily available to drop everything and follow Him, but maybe not. Maybe the Holy Spirit compelled him that this was the most important call he

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<sup>3</sup> Idea adapted from Frank Barker’s sermon “Taking Men Alive,” *The Gospel of Luke, Vol. 1*, p. 2.

would ever get in his life; that leaving the security of his tax collecting job was easy when he would live a life of adventure and potential with this compelling Man who stood before him and asked.

So Levi/Matthew decided to follow Jesus, and he was apparently so excited about this decision that he celebrated by throwing Jesus a big feast. He invited all of the guys from his office, right? It says there was a large company of tax collectors and others at the table. The Pharisees and scribes must have been somewhere outside looking in, and they just couldn't help criticizing who Jesus was spending His time with. Just like last week's text when Jesus encountered the leper and everyone thought that Jesus would become unclean by being around him, so here the religious leaders felt that these dirty sinners would contaminate Jesus. If nothing else, it wasn't good for His image. But they were also probably truly perplexed: Why would you ever spend time with people who aren't the most godly and upstanding? Why waste your time on these hopeless sinners?

That's a pretty easy mindset to translate to today: Why don't good Christians just stay inside their Christian bubble being around other good Christians? It's too messy, it's too hard not to be contaminated by the sinners out in the world. But Jesus shows us that that is a sad way to view the world. It's sinful people who need to hear the Gospel message. And how will people hear about our message if we are never with them? Notice that Jesus did not sin with the sinners, but He ate and spent time with them. We can and should do the same.

I believe that v. 32 is sarcasm, because there's no one who is righteous that doesn't need God. But there are plenty of people who think they are good enough. You have to be humble and admit that you need Jesus. Jesus saying that He had come to call the sinner to repentance should remind us that the American church has historically put too much emphasis on getting "good" people at church. We clean ourselves up and hide our sins and then head to church and keep up the act. There's an old saying that's been attributed to a bunch of people that challenges that mindset: "The church isn't a museum for saints but a hospital for sinners." What would happen if we got real and honest and admitted our sins and our great need for a Savior to each other? The world might be attracted to a community like that. Jesus certainly would be more attracted to our honesty.

The final section is the roll call list of the men who made Jesus' final cut:

### **III. From Disciples to Apostles (6:12-16)**

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

Verse 13 indicates that there were many more disciples/followers of Jesus from whom He would select just twelve to be apostles. Notice that He prayed all night before announcing His selections. The Apostles would be His inner circle, His most trusted followers, even as many more people followed Him. Apostle means "sent one." It also has a connection to a Hebrew word, *shaliach*. That is the word that described someone who had the power to speak and act for another. Philip Ryken says that, "a modern example would be the power of attorney that authorizes a personal representative to sign legal documents, or the authority an ambassador has to sign a treaty for his country... the apostles would become Christ's ambassadors... they would speak and act in Jesus' name – preaching the good news, performing miracles, and writing the New Testament Gospels and

Epistles. This was God's strategy for spreading the gospel."<sup>4</sup> Revelation 21:14 says that in the New Jerusalem "the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb." These selections that Jesus made were eternally significant.

All the Biblical lists start with Peter and end with Judas. There's a great book by John MacArthur called *Twelve Ordinary Men* if you want to read more about the individual apostles. Four of these men were fishermen, as well as two sets of brothers: brothers Peter and Andrew, then James and John, the "Sons of Thunder." Three of those men - Peter, James and John - would form Jesus' "inner" circle. The only thing we know about Andrew is that he brought Peter to Jesus, according to John 1. Philip is only mentioned a few times in the Gospels and it's usually him misunderstanding whatever situation they're in. Bartholomew is also known as Nathaniel, if you read this list and wondered if there was a name missing. Thomas is the "doubting Thomas" who would need to see Jesus' wounds before he believed. James the son of Alphaeus - that's literally all we know about him, he never speaks, never gets referred to; just an ordinary, faithful disciple. Simon the Zealot was part of the radical group that wanted to overthrow Rome; the zealots would hide daggers in their cloaks so they could attack Roman soldiers in busy places if the situation presented itself. Judas the son of James is also known as Jude; probably so he's not confused with the most notorious of the Apostles, Judas Iscariot, who not only stole regularly from the group's money bag, but also betrayed Jesus at the end of His life for 30 pieces of silver.

Apparently, Jesus wasn't too hung up on getting the group dynamics just right. We have a crazy mix of blue-collar workers who probably resented the Romans; at least one zealot who was essentially a domestic terrorist; a professional skeptic; a thief and turncoat; and a Jewish traitor who collected money for the oppressors. As Steve Daugherty says, "These men had very little reason to ever be found at dinner together. Jesus put weary blue-collars, a swindling government lapdog, and a volatile conspiracy theorist, to name a few, at the same table. Like a three-year, irresponsibly inflammatory arbitration meeting. And before Jesus's crucifixion, he said, 'A new command I give to you, that you love one another.'"<sup>5</sup>

This should remind us that we are brothers and sisters in Christ with people who are radically different from us, in every way that you can be different: personality, looks, skin color, language, background, wealth level, occupation, and value system. There's a tendency to think that Christians will be a lot like us, act a lot like us, worship just like us. But if you met and worshipped with different believers around the globe, you would understand the great diversity God has woven into His kingdom. Even more locally, it means that people in our most immediate tribe, this church, are going to think and act very differently. But whatever we disagree about - areas of Christian liberty, politics, how we parent, how we do school, etc. - we have to learn to work together and to love one another. Jesus has called us to be on mission together.

In addition to being radically different from each other, the main thing we realize about the apostles is how seemingly unqualified they were. Luke called them "*uneducated, common men*" in Acts 4:13. Watching them interact with Jesus and work alongside Him, so often what we see is what they lacked. They lacked spiritual understanding, they lacked humility, and they lacked faith. They fell asleep when Jesus asked them to pray. They were indignant at the wrong times. They boasted of their loyalty, but then fled when things got rough. They were unworthy men, dysfunctional in so many ways. And yet Jesus had called them. They accomplished things under Jesus' direction and in

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Volume 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), p. 256.

<sup>5</sup> Steve Daugherty's book *Experiments in Honesty* (Franklin, TN: Worthy, 2018), p. 239.

the power of the Holy Spirit that they would never have believed possible. They worked miracles they never dreamed as young men they would be able to do. They stood up to powerful people and walked in courage and boldness until one-by-one they were martyred for their faith.<sup>6</sup> Jesus made all the difference in their lives. He was not just a great leader, He was God in the flesh, and eventually, His death and resurrection would give them the greatest message to change the world.

You may think that you are the most unlikely person to be chosen by God to accomplish something. And the world might agree with you. Maybe all you see in yourself is the things that you lack: I don't have enough knowledge, I don't have enough self-control, I'm too introverted or I say the wrong thing at the wrong time. There's no way that God can use me. But if He could choose these twelve, then He can choose you. I've heard stories of gang members, drug addicts, totally self-absorbed hedonists having their whole lives turn around and given purpose and fulfillment in living for the Lord. Don't forget that the greatest church planter in history literally hunted down and put Christians to death before he realized how true Christianity was. Jesus can make all the difference in your life.

You will never be an Apostle, that office is closed. But if you are a follower of Jesus, you are a disciple. We often think that there's plain ordinary Christians, and then if you get really whipped into shape, maybe get "discipled" by someone (which probably involves lots of reading and memorizing), then you can graduate to being a disciple. But disciple just means "learner," so we are all disciples and God has called all of us to His team to help transform the world.

Let's bring this all together remembering that Jesus doesn't call the righteous but the sinners. The call to salvation and the call to works of ministry goes out to those who are unqualified. Which is great news to you and me. Romans 3:10 says that "*none is righteous, no, not one.*" We should be like Peter - "you should not be near me, Lord, I do not deserve You since I am full of sin." The sooner we realize that, the sooner we can stop being Pharisees and pretending that we are righteous enough to not need God. But God reaches beyond that sin and saves us. The Bible says that our righteousness comes from Jesus; His righteousness gets credited to our account when we believe on Him in faith. When we understand what Jesus has done for us, that He has given His life on the cross as a ransom to save us, we should run to Him. And maybe we throw a party, a big feast, to celebrate His love for us. Amen.

#### Benediction

Isaiah 55:6-7 - "*Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the Lord, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.*"

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<sup>6</sup> Adapted from David Silvernail's sermon "The Few and the Many" from October 20, 2019, found at [potomachills.org/sermons](http://potomachills.org/sermons)