



# CAPITOL COMMISSION™

## Jesus' Apostles: Transformation of the Twelve

ED HAMRICK

SELECTED SCRIPTURES

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If you were to ask anyone at the Capitol, whether it be legislators, lobbyists or government officials what they hoped to accomplish with their work here, you would likely receive similar responses. Most would say they want to make a difference bringing about change in a way that positively impacts people's lives. If we were instead to ask what they would like to see changed in their own lives and how they would go about doing it, I suspect we would receive many different responses. With only sixty days in the legislative session and hundreds of competing interests, vying to leave a lasting mark during the process, personal reflection and spiritual growth are often neglected.

**It is not hard in such an atmosphere to find our priorities and what's really important in our lives in a disordered state.**

Jesus' selection and instruction of the apostles reveals how important it is to first seek change from within, overcoming ones worldly ambitions and trusting in the power and grace of God to transform lives.<sup>1</sup>

*"The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst." Luke 17: 21*

### SELECTION OF THE TWELVE

*And He went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach... Mark 3:13-14*

If we were tasked with finding twelve individuals to undertake the tremendous responsibilities and world changing mission Jesus had in mind, it is unlikely we would have chosen any of the apostles described in the New Testament. They were common, working class men with no political influence, special status or unique talent. Seven of the twelve were likely fishermen. Not a single one possessed the kind of impressive resume we would look for today when putting together a task force or working group to address an important societal issue or problem. In addition to unimpressive resumes they are fraught with human weakness. With only approximately eighteen months to train them before His death and resurrection time is short, the stakes are high and the task seems impossible. How will Jesus mold these twelve men into the world changers they eventually become? As revealed in scripture, at times it was not an easy task.

### THEY WERE ONLY HUMAN

*...But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God.*

*I Cor. 1:27-29*

New Testament scripture does not ignore or gloss over the many weaknesses of the apostles. During their time of training, they are exposed as being uncaring, self-centered, cowardly, faithless and at times downright dense. Jesus often had to admonish or even rebuke them for their human frailties. (Luke 24:25, Mark 8:33) The following examples of their imperfections and Jesus' reaction to them remind us of how they were really human.

**Uncaring:** In Jesus' greatest hour of need the apostles are not able to pray with Him, falling asleep twice. (Mark 14:32-41) Jesus reacts to their lack of commitment by continuing to pray.

**Proud and Self-Centered:** The apostles have an on-going problem comprehending one of Jesus' most important lessons as they continue to argue about who is the greatest among them and who will attain the loftiest position in Heaven. (Luke 22:24) With Jesus crucifixion and death looming on the horizon He provides a final humbling example of humility by washing their feet. (John 13:1-17)

**Afraid:** All the apostles but one ran away and hid when Jesus was arrested, abandoning Him and leaving Him to face the cross alone. (Matthew 26:56) Peter, their leader, denies Him three times after promising, "I will never disown you." (Luke 22:54-62, Matthew 26:33-35) Jesus forgave them paying special attention to Peter. (John 21:15-23)

**Faithless:** The apostles witnessed numerous miracles performed by Christ and were repeatedly told He would rise from the grave. (John 2:18-22, Matthew 12:39-41) Yet, they are doubtful when learning of His resurrection and some remain so even after they see the risen Christ. Jesus appears to them numerous times, eating with them and providing proof of His crucifixion wounds. (Luke 24:38-43)

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### BUDGET WEEK BIBLE STUDY

**TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 12:00 NOON, TREASURER'S CONFERENCE ROOM (EB 54)**

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**Thick-headed:** The apostles repeatedly fail to grasp the important lessons Jesus is teaching them, yet He patiently and sometimes not so patiently continues to teach them. (Matthew 15:16-17, 16:9, John 12:16, Luke 24:25)

While these examples illustrate only a handful of the apostles' failures recorded in the New Testament it is clear Jesus chose these twelve men to demonstrate His strength and power can overcome weakness and imperfection. He would be the source of change and accomplishment in their lives.

### WHY TWELVE?

Have you ever wondered why Jesus chose twelve apostles? Why not five or eleven? Imagine the sports-based analogies one could use today with Jesus as the coach preparing His team for the big game.

From the outset of His ministry Jesus rejected the existing religious establishment and its corrupt, hypocritical leadership. He continuously exposed and condemned their lack of faith, self-righteous works and bureaucracy. They, in turn, regarded Him as a hated enemy and threat to their power and privilege. By appointing twelve common men to be His apostles, He was not only symbolically judging the twelve tribes of Israel but sending a clear message revolutionary change was on the way.

*"You are those who have stood by Me in My trials; and just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Luke 22:29-30*

### A TURNING POINT

The arrest, torture and crucifixion of Jesus Christ had to be the lowest point in the collective lives of the apostles. One of their own had just betrayed their leader, teacher, and friend to unimaginable suffering and death. They themselves had abandoned Him and were hiding in fear for their lives. They were, no doubt, experiencing tremendous emotional anguish, their hearts troubled, their hopes dashed. When all seems lost the resurrected Jesus appears to them. He addresses their fears and then He addressed their doubts. Yes, sadly, they still have doubt. Jesus then provides the apostles with a summary, a reminder of why He came, their role in His ministry, and what He would provide to them to help them carry out their mission.

*<sup>44</sup>Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in*

*the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." <sup>45</sup>Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, <sup>46</sup>and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, <sup>47</sup>and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup>"You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup>"And behold, I am sending forth the promise of My Father upon you; but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high." Luke 24:44-49*

While the development and growth of the apostles under Jesus tutelage was a process rather than a singular event, His resurrection, appearance and ascension to heaven definitely mark a turning point in their lives.

### ORDINARY MEN - EXTRAORDINARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Jesus had now delivered on all His promises and fulfilled His earthly mission. He had done all He could through His teachings, miracles and ultimate sacrifice to prepare them to share God's plan for the world's salvation. Will they be up for the challenge? Before we answer this question, let us look back to John chapter 17:6, 8, 20 where Jesus prays for His apostles and those who would believe in Him because of their testimony.

*<sup>6</sup>"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word... <sup>8</sup>For the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me... <sup>20</sup>"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word...*

Jesus petitions the Father on behalf of the apostles describing them as those who "obeyed," "accepted," and "believed" His message. He goes on to describe future followers as "those who will believe in me through their message." This is an amazing demonstration of Jesus' love for them as He expresses confidence in their fitness for the tremendous responsibility they will assume when He is gone. Jesus vouches for them knowing that in only a few short hours they will abandon Him while He suffers and dies on the cross. Later, as the apostles strive to carry out their mission this is likely an important moment they can recall to boost their confidence and steel their resolve. After His resurrection, Jesus sends them out into the world:

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*So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." John 20:21*

We now know the apostles surrendered to Jesus' command to disciple the nations with total commitment and confidence. No longer confused or doubtful they boldly preached the teachings, miracles, and resurrection of Jesus Christ by word, deed and example.

### INSTITUTING NEW RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

After the resurrection, the apostles replaced long-practiced, institutional religious beliefs that had been in place for over 1500 years with new beliefs. These changes were not only immediate – but radical. Norman Geisler and Frank Turek demonstrate how radically their beliefs changed in the following chart:<sup>2</sup>

| <u>Pre-Resurrection Belief</u> | <u>Post Resurrection Belief</u>           |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Animal Sacrifice               | Unnecessary because of Christ             |
| Binding law of Moses           | Non-binding because of Christ             |
| Strict Monotheism              | Trinity (3 Persons in one divine essence) |
| Sabbath                        | Replaced by Sunday Worship                |
| Conquering Messiah             | Sacrificial Messiah                       |
| Circumcision                   | Replaced by baptism & communion           |

The Jewish people believed these Old Testament practices were revealed to them by God. They believed to abandon these institutions would be to risk their souls, being damned to hell after death.<sup>3</sup>

### WRITING BOOKS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

The apostle's lives with Christ and His teachings became the source from which most of the New Testament would be written. The original apostles are responsible for writing 8 books or nearly 1/3 of the New Testament. How were these simple, uneducated men able to assemble this great document that remains as relevant today as it was 2000 years ago? In John 14:25-26 Jesus promises the New Testament through His apostles. ***"These***

*things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. "But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you."* Their writings remain the source of all true church doctrine today.

### FOUNDING THE EARLY CHURCH

The apostles played a critical leadership role in the founding of the early church and spreading the message of the gospel. ***"So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone..." (Eph. 2:20)*** They were Jesus' official representatives and endowed with His authority and His message. Once doubters of Christ's miracles, they now perform them to confirm their message. Christianity is born from their efforts.

While the apostles had clearly changed, as evidenced by their work, the religious establishment and Roman authorities had not. The apostles and many of their followers endured constant persecution and suffering for their beliefs. The apostles willingly submitted themselves to torture, imprisonment, and death for the glory of Christ. They never denied Him again and because of their faith they were all martyred but one.

### WILL YOU ACCEPT GOD'S TRANSFORMING POWER?

Jesus transformed the lives of twelve common men, flawed as they were, and they transformed the world. There are many lessons to be learned from both the failures and successes of the apostles during their lifetimes. For me, one of the most important lessons is how their love for Christ and His love for them tempered their strengths and exposed their weaknesses allowing them to overcome their worldly fears and ambitions and accomplish great things on His behalf. Their story reveals in dramatic fashion the unimaginable potential available to all of us to bring about positive change if we are willing to allow Christ to transform our lives through His power and grace.

***Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:1-2***

<sup>1</sup>Much of this study adapted from *Twelve Ordinary Men* by John MacArthur.

<sup>2</sup>Geisler, Norman. Turek, Frank. *I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist*.

<sup>3</sup>Strobel, Lee. *The Case for Christ*. Interview with J.P. Moreland