

The Gospel According to Luke

“Mountain Men”

Chapter 6:12-19

Introduction

Jesus took His disciples on their first mountain retreat. I see that they were with Him on the mountain when I read, in verse seventeen, “He came down **with them...**”

It was unlike our modern, cushy, Christian retreats. There wasn't a syllabus or even a schedule. There was no guest speaker. No special guest worship artist. There was no lodging.

Jesus spent “**all night in prayer to God.**” The next day His prayer yielded the program for reaching the multitudes throughout the centuries. He would entrust the ministry of the Gospel to twelve men who would go out and make disciples of more men and women, who would then do the same – generation after generation.

On the surface, *it's not a very stable plan.* You're even told that one of His men “**became a traitor.**” Someone once said that Christianity is always only one generation away from extinction.

True – if you look only on the surface, at the failings and frailties of the followers of Jesus. There is something below the surface – something you can ‘see’ in the actions of Jesus all that night of prayer, and the next day, when “**power went out from Him.**”

The two things you ‘see’ below the surface:

1. First - Jesus praying all night for His disciples is a picture of His praying all the time for you. After His crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension, He is in heaven, at the Father's right hand, where He is described as constantly praying for you. Jesus still prays for us, and from a much greater vantage point.

2. Second – You’ll notice that, when Jesus and His newly appointed “**apostles**” came down, only the Lord ministered to the multitudes. Jesus was in the midst of His ministers, doing all the ministry. Jesus promised that, after His ascension into heaven, He’d be in our midst when we gather together. So this is a second picture: The Lord is in the midst of us to power us for the ministry.

Jesus praying all night on the mountain reminds us He is praying all the time from a greater ‘mount’; and, though He is in heaven, He promised to be in our midst with power sufficient for our task.

Christianity is Christ and is therefore *never* in danger of extinction! We’ll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Is Still On The Mount Praying For You, and #2 Jesus Is Still In Your Midst Powering You.

#1 Jesus Is Still On The Mount Praying For You (v12-16)

The Bible declares that Jesus “**always lives to make intercession**” for you (Hebrews 7:25). Jesus is praying for you. He’s praying for us, as a Church. It’s one reason that the Church cannot, and will not, ultimately fail, and why the gates of Hell will not prevail against us.

The marvelous mountain retreat in our text set the stage for all the subsequent history of the Church. Jesus was directed by His Father to choose twelve men as apostles from the greater number of disciples. Let’s watch it unfold.

Luke 6:12 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

You’ve heard it said, “*If Jesus needed to pray, how much more do we need to be praying!*” I understand the sentiment... But I’m not sure I’m comfortable with the words, “Jesus needed to pray.” I think it better to see Jesus as *wanting* to pray, as *loving* to pray, as *living* for prayer.

If you are not careful you allow very subtle errors of perspective to creep into your thinking. Instead of being a source of joy, prayer is seen as a struggle.

We can't say for sure what the disciples were doing all night on the mountain. Some may have prayed, even all night; some may have slept all night. The emphasis is on what Jesus did for His disciples that night, *not* what they ought to have done for Him.

Luke 6:13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to *Himself*; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:

A larger group of “disciples” was present on the mountain. A disciple is a *learner*. In those days, when you were a disciple, you literally followed your teacher around. You lived with him.

From this larger group, Jesus chose “twelve... apostles.” An apostle is a messenger sent out with a special commission. The sense you get from reading through the New Testament is that the original twelve apostles had a unique place and purpose. For example: After Jesus ascended into heaven, the eleven remaining apostles realized they must replace Judas, the traitor, who had by that time hung himself. They chose Matthias. Some people think they were wrong to do this; but afterwards the Book of Acts refers to the apostles as “the twelve.”

Why was it important there be “the twelve” unique apostles? Twelve was an important number, a symbolic number. The nation of Israel consisted of twelve tribes. When Jesus chose twelve apostles, He was letting us know that He was establishing something new. He was establishing a new nation, a spiritual nation, the true people of God. God was not forgetting His unconditional promises to the physical descendants of Abraham; but something greater was beginning. Jesus was establishing His Church, which would consist of both Jews and Gentiles.

Luke 6:14 Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and John; Philip and Bartholomew;
Luke 6:15 Matthew and Thomas; James the *son* of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot;

Luke 6:16 Judas *the son of James*, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.

The twelve were an unlikely group of ministers:

1. The first name recorded was Simon, whom Jesus also called *Peter*. Jesus had given Simon a new name. Sometimes Peter is referred to as Cephias. "**Peter**" is the Greek equivalent of the Aramaic *Cephas* - a word meaning *stone* or *rock*. Simon was a fisherman for whom Jesus had provided a miraculous catch of fish. Then Jesus had called him to be a follower. He became one of three in Jesus' core group among the disciples. Although Peter would deny ever knowing Jesus, Luke's Gospel alone has Jesus' prayer on behalf of Peter that his faith would not fail. The risen Christ made a special appearance to Peter. He would become a leader in the Jerusalem church, write two letters that appear in the Bible, and be crucified for his faith - we believe upside down.
2. Andrew was Peter's brother and also a fisherman. Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist and had accepted John the Baptist's testimony that Jesus was "**the Lamb of God.**" He had left John to follow Jesus and then had brought his brother Simon to Jesus.
3. James and John had also been fishermen and, incidentally, Peter and Andrew's business partners. Along with Peter, the three of them became Jesus' inner circle, witnessing certain miracles and Jesus' transfiguration. James would become the first martyr for the Christian faith. John would write the Gospel of John, the letters of 1, 2, and 3 John, and the book of Revelation. These two men may have been Jesus' distant cousins; thus, at one point, they requested special places in Christ's kingdom. Scripture gives glimpses of these men, revealing that they were somewhat short-tempered and judgmental; for example, they wanted to call fire down from heaven on an inhospitable Samaritan village. Jesus called them "**Sons of Thunder.**"
4. John wrote about Philip, "**The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, 'Follow me'**" (John 1:43). Philip then brought Bartholomew (also called Nathanael). In the list of disciples here and in Matthew, Philip and Bartholomew are listed together; in John's Gospel, Philip and Nathanael are paired up. It seems reasonable to conclude, then, that since

Bartholomew is not mentioned in John, and Nathanael is not mentioned in the other Gospels, Nathanael and Bartholomew must be the same person. Nathanael was an honest man; indeed, Jesus' first words to him were, "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false" (John 1:47). Nathanael at first rejected Jesus because Jesus was from Nazareth. But upon meeting Jesus, his attitude changed and he exclaimed, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel."

5. Matthew was also known as *Levi*. He had been a tax collector who, at Jesus' call, had given up everything in order to follow him. Then he had invited all his tax collector friends to also meet Jesus. He would later write the Gospel of Matthew.
6. Thomas is often remembered as 'Doubting Thomas' because he doubted Jesus' resurrection. Thomas had not been with the disciples at Jesus' first appearance, so when the other disciples said that Jesus was alive, he didn't believe them. However, when Thomas saw and touched the living Christ, he readily believed.
7. James was called *son of Alphaeus* to differentiate him from James the son of Zebedee (and brother of John).
8. Simon the Zealot is also called, in some versions of Scripture, Simon the Canaanite. "Zealot" used here indicates either that Simon was involved in subversive activities against the Roman occupation of Israel; or simply zeal for God's honor and fervent nationalism
9. Judas Iscariot. The name "Iscariot" is probably a compound word meaning *the man from Kerioth*. Thus, Judas's hometown was Kerioth in southern Judea, making him the only one of the Twelve who was not from Galilee.

To use our terms, these men were ordained as the first ministers. *That excites me!* Jesus selected ordinary men with a mixture of backgrounds and personalities to be his disciples. Jesus did not choose these twelve to be his disciples because of their faith - it often faltered. He didn't choose them because of their talent and ability - no one stood out with unusual ability. The disciples represented a wide range of backgrounds and life experiences, and apparently they may have had no more leadership potential than those who were not chosen. They were laughable as a group of ministers!

It might seem strange that Jesus would spend an entire night in prayer to pick this group, then end up choosing Judas. Did Jesus make a mistake? No. Did God? No. The plan had been set in motion from the beginning of time, and this was part of the plan that would eventually come to its final conclusion in Judas's betrayal of Jesus and suicide. The betrayal fulfilled prophecy and helped to bring Jesus to the cross. There was no mistake.

That's not to say Judas was without his own free will to choose. Human beings have free will and are held responsible for their choices. Judas is an example. He was in no way coerced to betray Jesus. His betrayal was his own willful, responsible choice. **God knew for sure that Judas would freely choose to betray Jesus.**

There are many lessons we might draw from Jesus choosing Judas. For example: If Jesus had a traitor in His midst, so might we from time to time. Were we wrong to ordain that person? Did God make a mistake? No. While we may not be able to fully understand and explain it, God remains in complete control.

Jesus never wrote any books. He never led any church-growth conferences or revival meetings. He left no organizational charts for us to follow. His one and only method for founding and building up His Church was the men whom he called to follow him. These men were His organization; they were Plan A. There was no Plan B.

No wonder he spent an extended period of time in prayer before choosing them. What a contrast to the way that Christians operate so much of the time, making decisions and then asking God to bless them. How much better the decisions would be, how much more effective the work and healthy the Churches, if we would follow Jesus' model: Pray first - really pray - and only then act.

Jesus stills prays for His Church - only He's doing it from heaven. Regardless *our* commitment to prayer, we can be confident **He is praying for us.**

#2 Jesus Is Still In Your Midst
Powering You
(v17-19)

If you had just been ordained, you'd be a "Zealot" to get busy for God. Coming down from the mountain, there was a multitude of people. "OK, Lord; set us loose to minister!"

Jesus instead provided another illustration. As far as the record goes, ministry took place because Jesus was in the midst of the twelve and His other disciples. He did all the **teaching**; He did all the **touching**.

Later the apostles would participate in more direct ways; **they** would teach and touch. But the lesson was burned into their minds: Jesus in the midst of us is the key to releasing God's power into needy hearts and lives.

Luke 6:17 And He came down with them and stood on a level place with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear Him and be healed of their diseases,

Luke 6:18 as well as those who were tormented with unclean spirits. And they were healed.

Luke 6:19 And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed *them* all.

Jesus stood "with them," with His apostles, and "a crowd of His disciples." Today we would say He is in the midst of the Church leaders and the congregation of His disciples. In fact, Jesus described Himself just that way in the Book of the Revelation. He described Himself as walking in the midst of His Church on earth.

People flocked to Jesus. We spend too much time trying to figure out how to get people to flock to Church. We usually end up getting believers who change Churches because they like some greater comfort we are offering.

We ought to concentrate on exalting Jesus. He must be present, in our midst. When He is, *it doesn't matter where we meet!*

The people came for two reasons:

1. They came "to hear Him."
2. They came to "be healed of their diseases" and of demons.

People still come for those same two reasons. We must be about the business of *teaching* and *touching* if they are to hear and be healed.

As far as **teaching**... People hear Jesus when His Word is taught. We can modernize; we can be contemporary; we can utilize current events and the latest technology. But we must always center our meetings around the Bible. The very best way for people to hear the Lord is to teach the Bible verse-by-verse, chapter-by-chapter, book-by-book. It gives the Holy Spirit opportunity to speak to your heart as He empowers God's living Word to discern between your soul and your spirit. It gives Him the opportunity to reveal the risen, living Jesus to you.

As far as **touching**... We always immediately balk at talk about healing. We don't see Jesus healing 100% of the time in our midst. *We may not see Him healing at all!* Instead there are more-and-more cases of cancer... More-and-more instances of disease... Deeper-and-deeper cases of depression.

The first thing I would suggest is that we have a very limited view of the world. When Pastor Dan Finrock was here, he told you about some amazing miracles of healing and deliverance that are taking place elsewhere in the bigger world around us.

More to the point: As you read on in the New Testament, healing continues – and it continues today. But you also encounter many faithful saints who were not physically healed. Men like Timothy, and Epaphroditus, and (especially) Paul. From them you learn a deeper truth regarding healing – you learn that God's supernatural power to sustain you by His grace is sufficient for you to suffer with joy and for His glory.

“**Power**” still goes out from Jesus; but it is the power of patient endurance should He choose to *not* heal you of your physical infirmity. You are blessed instead to share in the fellowship of His sufferings, and to give a testimony of faithful abiding. You are empowered to live above your suffering.

One additional thought. When Jesus was on the earth, He was offering to establish God's literal, physical Kingdom. One of the

characteristics of the Kingdom of God on earth is healing and health. The Jews rejected His offer, rejected the Kingdom; its establishment has been postponed until Jesus returns. We are living in the Church Age, not the kingdom, and though healing continues, it is not characteristic.

This, then, is how we are to touch people: By putting them in touch with the power of Jesus to heal them **or** to sustain them should He deem it more honorable, more glorious, for them to suffer a light affliction for the short time they are on the earth, so that for eternity they may be revealed as glorious.

Conclusion

Jesus is still on the mount; He is still in our midst. People come (whether they know it or not) to hear Him, and to be healed by Him.

If they are taught, it must be by Jesus as His Spirit opens their ears to hear what He has to say.

If they are touched, it must be by Jesus as sufficient power goes out from Him – often so that they may patiently endure their sufferings with an inexpressible joy.