

The Diverse Dozen

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Preacher: Jonathan Gemmell

[0 : 0 0] Well, please have a seat and let's pray together. Father God, we're so conscious that blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on this law day and night.

That person is like a tree planted by streams of water which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever they do prospers.

Father God, we long so much to be those kind of people. So Lord, as we take time together to meditate and think about your words, Father, would you use it to do your work and send your spirit that it might be alive, that it might be dynamic and that it might bring about transformation in our lives for your glory alone.

Amen. This morning we're just looking at five verses in Luke's Gospel. I called it the Diverse Dozen and I love that photo until I realised this morning that there's only 11 people sitting on the ledge.

I thought I might get away with it by saying the 12th was taking the photo. But we'll just go with it. The 20th of October 1968 was a day that the world changed.

[1 : 2 2] After the 20th of October, that is 48 years ago last Thursday, nothing would ever be the same again. It was a day that the world changed.

That is, the world of high jumping. It was on the 20th of October 1968 in Mexico City at the Olympics that Richard Douglas Fosbury, the American athlete, jumped over the high jump in a way that no one had ever jumped before.

Up until that moment, everyone had used the technique called the barrel roll, where you'd run up to the bar forwards, you would then push off with your main foot and you would roll over it like this, with a bit more grace and a bit more height.

Richard Douglas Fosbury, however, during his time at university, had developed a new technique, famously called the Fosbury flop, where you would run up in the same manner, except at a slight angle you would push off from your dominant foot, and you would arch your back and go off over backwards.

Richard Fosbury changed the game. He laid a fresh foundation for the way that high jump would be done from that moment on. No one looked back.

[2 : 5 2] And what goes on in these seemingly five innocuous verses, in the middle of Luke chapter 6, is an absolute game changer.

After this moment, nothing would be the same again. It would be a fresh foundation, a defining moment.

What happens in these verses is almost a miracle that no one notices. So I've greatly enjoyed looking at it, and if you would turn to Luke chapter 6, and verse 12, I'll read it.

One of those days, Luke writes, Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

When morning came, he called his twelve disciples to him, whom he also designated apostles. Simon, whom he named Peter.

[3 : 56] Simon's brother Andrew. James, John. Philip, Bartholomew. Matthew, Thomas. James, son of Alphaeus. Simon, who was called the Zealot. Judas, son of James.

And Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. Wonderful verses. And the first thing I want us to see is that this is a radical move.

This is a radical move in Jesus' ministry and in world history. What happens in these five verses? You have to say Jesus has done some pretty remarkable things so far in Luke's gospel.

He has declared himself to be the spirit-anointed preacher that Isaiah foresaw 800 years before Jesus turned up. When in the synagogue at Nazareth, he says, Jesus has driven out demons and they have submitted to his authority.

Jesus has taught with authority and everyone has been amazed. We have never heard teaching like this before. Jesus has healed many people of all sorts of diseases, even that most stigmatized of disorders, leprosy.

[5 : 24] Jesus has blown fishermen's minds by orchestrating a miraculous catch of fish. It takes quite a lot to blow fishermen's minds with catching fish.

And yet Jesus has done it. Jesus has read people's thoughts. He's claimed to have authority to forgive sins. And just to prove the point, he's told a paralyzed man to get up and walk.

Jesus has clashed with religious leaders over their interpretation of the law and his claim to be Lord of the Sabbath and the Son of Man who has authority to forgive sins.

All this has been radical, never before seen and never to be seen again through the ministry and life of one man. And yet what goes on here in Luke chapter 6 is more radical than all of that put together.

As Jesus goes up on a mountainside to pray, he spends the whole night praying to God. That phrase, the whole night, has already been used in Luke's gospel for how Peter toiled all night fishing.

[6 : 35] It's the same phrase. Jesus has been toiling all night in prayer. The incarnate Son communing with the Eternal Father on a mountainside in Galilee.

And he does that because this is a seismic shift, a change moment, a watershed episode in redemptive history.

Jesus spends the whole night laboring prayer, in prayer to find the Father's will as to who should be his 12 designated apostles.

Jesus then descends the mountain having spent the whole night in prayer. He calls all of his disciples to him, this big group that have been following him, as we have in his journey around Galilee.

And then he calls 12. 12 particular disciples whom he designates apostles.

[7 : 41] And you have to say, that doesn't seem that radical until you superimpose it onto Israel's history and realize that the only other person who went up a mountain to commune with God and then descended and called 12 people to himself to teach them God's law was Moses.

That the foundation of Israel's covenant relationship with God would be based on the teaching of Moses to these 12 men who were to disseminate it to all of the 12 tribes of Israel.

And here Jesus radically changes course and calls 12 new men to redefine the way that the covenant is going to operate.

Jesus calls these 12 men to reimagine, reinvent, and redefine how God would commune with his people. He is laying a fresh foundation of the way that things are going to be from now on, now that the King of Glory has come into the world.

These 12, these 12 men to be his spokesmen, to declare this life-changing, eternity-securing, sin-forgiving message to the entire world.

[9 : 06] These people who are going to be his ambassadors. As Jesus lays the fresh foundation, the radical moment in redemptive history.

And you have to say it was truly necessary because most of chapter 5 has been taken up with Jesus clashing with the religious leaders. The people whose responsibility has been teaching Old Testament law to the people and defining it in the smallest minutiae possible that the law has become big and God has become small in the equation.

We left chapter 11 with the Pharisees and the teachers of the law being furious and beginning to discuss with one another what they might do with Jesus.

A similar account in Matthew talks about how they might destroy Jesus. That it seems that there is a no-through road now in the way that things have become in Old Testament law.

And now that Messiah has come, the game has changed. And he chooses a new team with a new mission.

[10 : 26] He chooses them to be the new wineskins into which to pour this new covenant message in order that there might be hope for everyone well beyond the borders of Israel.

This is the seismic shift that Paul writes about in the book of Romans. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by works of the law.

That's what the Pharisees thought. Rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been made known to which the law and the prophets testify.

The righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. That is a game changer. That the law now is not a way to be saved, but it's a way to show our necessity of Jesus in order to be saved.

This is a game changer, a fresh foundation of the superior covenant that will make the old covenant obsolete and passé. And this is great news for us.

[11 : 34] This fresh foundation, because let's be clear, not many of us in here are ethnically Jewish. And yet, in choosing these twelve, Jesus is making known that the doors are open.

A new and living way is being forged through Jesus Christ. This new covenant is not going to be based on obedience to the law, but on acceptance of the good news of Jesus Christ.

It is not going to be about obeying laws written on stone tablets. It's going to be about God working on us to sear that law onto our hearts and help us obey it from the inside out through the indwelling Holy Spirit, which is secured through faith in Jesus Christ.

One not secured on our performance, but one that is eternally secure on the performance of another. Jesus Christ, who perfectly obeys the law for us, because we couldn't.

And Jesus chooses these twelve apostles to make that known to everyone. Exactly what Paul talks about in Ephesians 2. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers.

[12 : 54] That's talking about Gentiles, which is us. But fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ himself as the chief cornerstone.

This is a radical move. This is a watershed moment. This is a seismic shift. As the twelve tribes of Israel are superseded by these twelve new apostles that Jesus chooses and designates to be his spokesmen, his official declarers, these heralds of the way things now are.

that God's people will no longer be defined by race. They will be defined by grace. Meaning that the doors are flung open. And everyone who will look on the sun and trust him are welcome.

Everyone who will believe their message can be a part of God's people forever. That is a radical move.

But then see also, it is a random mix of people. Twelve. Three sets of brothers. At least four fishermen.

[14 : 17] And whenever they're listed, they're always listed in four groups. The first four are always Simon, Peter, Andrew, James and John.

These are seemingly the inner circle who are privy to more of Jesus than maybe the rest. It'll be these four that go into Jairus' daughter when she's dead.

It'll be these four that are up the mountain on the day that Jesus is transfigured. These four always appear first. Simon, Peter, is always number one. But in the different list, the other three kind of switch around a bit for a bit of variety.

The next four are always Philip, Bartholomew, who some people call Nathaniel, Matthew, who's also called Levi, and Thomas. They make fleeting appearances in the Gospels.

They play like little cameo roles. And then we get another three. James, the lesser son of Alphaeus. Simon, the zealot. Judas, son of James, sometimes called Thaddeus so he doesn't get confused with other Judas.

[15 : 20] These three we know next to nothing about. And then finally, Judas Iscariot. Iscariot either because he comes from the region of Judah called Kerioth, or maybe Judas Iscariot, meaning he's the dagger man who is thought to be part of the same religious sect, the same nationalist sect as Simon the zealot.

It's a very diverse group. It needs to be a very diverse group if this universal message is going to get to everyone. It's going to take all sorts of people to reach all sorts of people.

It's quite an awkward group as well. You have got Levi, or Matthew, the tax collector. That means he is a Roman sympathizer.

He's in cahoots with the Romans and actually working for them to exhort money from his own people. Matthew, the tax collector, in Jesus' top team with Simon the zealot, who is a nationalist, who's part of a radical guerrilla movement who wants to do anything and everything to throw the Romans out.

That must have been quite awkward around the dinner table, do you not think? Matthew, the sympathizer with Simon, the hardcore nationalist. Or what about Thomas, who's famous for being a little bit sceptical, a little bit cynical, a little bit slow on the uptake.

[17 : 12] And then Peter, who's famous for jumping in with both feet, one kind of slow and reticent, the other speaking before he's even thought. Or what about James and John, whose nickname is Boanerges, which means sons of thunder because they've got a bit of a bad temper.

On their school report, it would say they don't play well with others. Or you've got Nathaniel, who is the deep-thinking Israelite, the one Jesus says, there is an Israelite in whom there's no deceit.

And you've got Philip, who's seemingly a bit slow, having spent three years with Jesus and says, right, what is it all about? When are we going to see God? Such an odd group of people, a random group.

And yet Jesus doesn't choose them because of what they are. He chooses them because of what they will be made into all by his grace. So you have Simon Peter, whose life is radically transformed.

The only time he doesn't speak before he's thought is when Jesus dies. When he's being tried and a little girl comes up to him and says, you're one of Jesus' followers. And he says, no, I'm not.

[18 : 38] I swear I'm not. I'm not. Oh, why is the cock growing? And yet we see somebody who was so reticent about being associated with Jesus writes a letter in the New Testament at the end of his life saying, this is why you should stick out like a sore thumb for Jesus Christ.

He's worried about that association and at the end of his life says, oh, you can crucify me because of Jesus, but can you do it upside down because I'm not worthy to die in the same way?

Or what about Thomas who's seemingly cynical and slow to believe, runs all over Persia and down into India where he'll eventually die, convincing people that Jesus is worth all of your life and your eventual death.

Or what about James, the church leader, the first bishop of Jerusalem, who was killed by Herod and his brother, John, who were seemingly bad-tempered people, John, at the end of his life, wheeled out into church services where his only sermon would be, love one another.

Jesus doesn't choose these people because of what they are in Luke 6. He chooses them what they will be all by his grace through the power of his Holy Spirit.

[20 : 02] Nobody in Luke 6 is thinking, Jesus, you've done a brilliant job. I'm sure as all the other disciples are there going, well, if he's in, why aren't I in?

And yet Jesus knows exactly what he's doing. But you can say right here in Luke 6 with this random mix, you can say this is kind of a microcosm of the people that God chooses, who saves by his grace and calls them to be family, to be a team together.

I look around this room and I think, what an eclectically weird mix of people. And yet what Jesus does here in Luke 6 is exactly what Jesus has been doing ever since he laid this fresh foundation of making strangers into family, of making old and young, rich and poor, wise and foolish together as one, laid on this fresh foundation in these apostles.

Now I don't think we can move on until we've looked at verse 16, the whole Judas Iscariot problem. We read it with chilling effect. Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

This man Judas who has become infamous, whose name has become synonymous with being a turncoat. And I guess it always prompts the question in our mind, who is responsible for Judas' betrayal?

[21 : 41] Why did Jesus choose Judas knowing he would betray him? Was Judas set up as a patsy, a mere pawn from the very beginning? Who's responsible for Judas' betrayal?

Was it divine sovereignty or human responsibility? And the answer is yes. The Bible is full of this tension.

Joseph and his brothers in Genesis. Where they do what they want to do but only actually fulfill God's plan in the end. You meant it for evil but God meant it for good.

Even Jesus' death. Indeed, Herod Pontius Pilate says in Acts 4, met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus whom you appointed.

They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Gentiles, they did what they wanted to do but because of God's sovereignty only actually did what God had ordained should happen.

[22 : 56] It's kind of like the rings in the Olympics. You need both. You need to hold on to both at the same time or else you flip like this. You need to hold both things in tension.

Great quote is this. The truth does not lie in one extreme or the other nor in the middle. The truth lies in both extremes held together.

The truth does not lie in one extreme or the other much less does it lie in the middle. The truth lies in both extremes held together. Judas betrayed Jesus as a result of his opportunistic selfish hatred of Jesus Christ.

Judas betrayed Jesus as an agent to fulfill God's eternal plan. It's what theologians call antimony holding two things seemingly opposed in tension.

Spurgeon was asked how do you reconcile human responsibility with divine sovereignty to which Spurgeon simply said I don't reconcile friends. before we leave Judas though the scary thing is no one suspects Judas.

[24 : 15] You read all through the Gospels so when Jesus at the Last Supper says one of you will betray me everybody's not pointing and saying there's Judas. Judas has played a blinder.

He's hidden in plain sight. He has all the right answers. He goes to all the discipleship meetings. Everyone thinks he's a good guy. He plays his role.

He dons the mask. He blends in and I think the scariest thing is as a church leader is we may not be betrayers like Judas but we can happily play a part.

We can say all the right things sing all the right things do all the right things use the best language we can have so much theological knowledge it would blow your mind but at the end of the day it was all for show and not for keeps and so I wonder if Judas doesn't just make us question how does divine sovereignty and human responsibility fit together I think it invites us to challenge our own hearts am I on Jesus team or simply in the Brunfield club because the scary thing is Judas had every opportunity and hung out forever with Jesus and the crew but he was never really in it so easy day after day Sunday after Sunday week after week month after month year after year decade after decade just come to church that's what

I do and let's let Judas challenge us but whether this is all for show or whether it's really for keeps whether I have a fascination with Jesus and his church or whether I know Jesus and love his church because that's a real difference finally and with this I come into land it seems like a pretty risky method we've already heard in chapter 6 verse 11 the cross looming large on the horizon that it's not going to end well for Jesus that he is going to be killed according to the father's will and his work is going to have to be left to others and he chooses these twelve he chooses these people to be his ambassadors his designated official spokesman and as we've already said none of these people are on anybody's shortlist to be in the boardroom of any global enterprise if this is

[27 : 01] Jesus crack team of world dominating missionaries then at Luke 6 it seems the project is a total non-starter and a damp squib before anyone's gone anywhere when Jesus reads out his team sheet everybody is thinking really these guys Thaddeus he doesn't seem to have a clue Philip honestly he seems a bit dim John MacArthur writes the propagation of the gospel and the founding of the church hinged entirely on twelve men whose most outstanding characteristic was their ordinariness no one is picking these twelve guys no one has them on their team sheet except Jesus and let's be honest no one's got us on their team sheet to transform Brunfield or Edinburgh with the message of Jesus Christ none of us are getting chosen for that correct team by human standards and yet that is

God's absolute modus operandi this is how he always works he always chooses nobodies and by his grace makes them somebodies in order that they might go and tell everybody about him he reminds this prideful church in 1 Corinthians of that brothers and sisters think of what you were when you were called not many of you were wise by human standards not many were influential not many were of noble birth but God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are so that no one may boast before him let's be honest no one's choosing any of us except God and yet the very reason that God chooses us so that when we're transformed by his grace and make Jesus known to others only he gets the glory which is exactly what he ordains to happen from the very beginning so that no one may boast

John MacArthur again the 2000 year triumph of the apostolic endeavour is a testimony to the wisdom and power of the divine strategy if we were choosing this by human standards we'd have all been left on the bench and yet Jesus calls us to be a member of his team to turn the world upside down which is exactly what they comment the disciples did in Acts 17 and we know it works the fact we're here today sharing this apostolic gospel with each other is testimony that it works that this gospel these 12 people would even get the gospel to Scotland and we're here because of it and we know that it works in the end because in Revelation 21 verse 4 it says this the walls of the city had 12 foundations and on them were the names of the 12 apostles of the

Lamb that this eternal kingdom that Jesus came to inaugurate and will one day be built it worked and this foundation was set and their names are on the foundations no one except God would choose us and yet God's speciality is to use weak scared fragile and timid people to bring his son glory to make his son known to put on display the transformation that his grace brings about and so we're not able to do this task but trusting in God is more than possible it's more than possible because God's power is and has always been made perfect in our weakness let's pray Father God we're here this morning and the only thing that we have is our outstanding ordinariness and yet

Lord we're so conscious that you're the God who places the treasure of your gospel in jars of clay so that everyone would see that this all-surpassing power the all-surpassing power of the apostolic gospel handed from Jesus to these twelve men that everyone would see that that power comes from you and not from us and so Lord we're conscious of our fragility we're conscious of our brittleness we're conscious of our unimpressiveness and yet Lord we're asking that you would send us out from this place to make much of Jesus in and through our lives so that people would see that this all-surpassing power is from you and not from us that we might not boast about what we've done or what we can do but you would blow our minds with all that you are and all that you're able to do even through us so Lord thank you that you've chosen us to be on your team Father God thank you that you're still choosing people to be on your team and so Lord we'd ask that if there were any today still in the stands as spectators

[32 : 32] Lord you would call them to yourself and Father that they would enter the fray as members of your family who have the eternal hope of being with you forever in the new creation so bless us and help us in Jesus glorious and wise and powerful name Amen