

Luke 6:12-16

Sermon: **Jesus Chooses the Twelve**

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DECISIONS THAT SHAPED OUR PATH — AND THE PATH OF OTHERS

1. In the passage before us, Jesus makes one of the most significant decisions of His earthly ministry. Here, He chooses the twelve apostles who, after His departure, will proclaim the Gospel to the entire world.

1.1. Let's read the first verse, **(Luke 6:12)** *"Now it was at this time that He went off to the mountain to pray, and He spent the whole night in prayer to God."*

1.2. As we study the Synoptic Gospels — Matthew, Mark, and Luke — we can see that Jesus' life, right before this moment of choosing the twelve, had become something like controlled chaos. More and more people wanted to see Him; Galilee was swarming with crowds who came to be healed of all kinds of diseases. Jesus would withdraw into the wilderness to preach, only to return to the towns where multitudes awaited Him. The Pharisees were tightening their grip, pressuring Him at every turn. There were constant crossings of the lake by boat, the masses following Him from shore to shore, crowds waiting for Him wherever He went — longing to be healed and to hear His word. More and more, His life resembled an "action film" with no end in sight. And so, every moment He could slip away to pray, to be alone with the Father, was infinitely precious to Him.

1.3. But this prayer is different. This time, Jesus is about to choose twelve apostles who will alter the course of human history. *"I, Jesus, must get this right; I cannot miss this. The destiny of all humanity hinges on My choice of these twelve."*

1.4. The text tells us that He prayed all night long. That raises a question: if Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, already knew who would be chosen, why did the Gospel writers emphasize that He spent the entire night in prayer? As I've said many times in previous sermons (and forgive my insistence — I repeat this only because it is so vital for us as human beings), Jesus came into this world as a uniquely human being to be our model, our example. Every decision He made, every act He performed, was a compass for us — showing how to walk by faith.

That's why I believe we must read this story of Jesus choosing the twelve in that same light. Jesus is teaching us how to face the weight of important decisions in our own lives.

1.5. This decision mattered deeply to Him — it was no small thing. He felt its gravity and treated it with utmost seriousness, which is why He prayed through the night.

Even though Jesus believed that every decision He made ultimately came from God the Father... even though He trusted that the Father's will would be accomplished regardless of human freedom... even though He knew that nothing — not even His own human will — could hinder God's plan for this world... He did not take a passive stance and say: *"Well, whatever happens will happen — my choices don't matter."* Nor did He think: *"It doesn't matter whom I choose; it could be anyone, because God's will is bound to prevail."*

No. That was not Jesus' mindset. He prayed all night.

1.6. Jesus took His responsibility seriously. He understood that every decision He made directly affected the outcome within God's divine plan. That's why He spent the night in prayer — seeking wisdom, asking His Father for guidance, clarity, and ultimately the strength to decide rightly.

1.7. Each of us knows from personal experience how our choices have shaped the lives of others around us. We know how those decisions have defined our own path — the life we now live. Without the decisions we've made, we wouldn't be where we are today; we wouldn't live with the people we live with, work where we work, raise the children we raise. Most importantly, we wouldn't walk the path of faith we now walk.

Every one of those moments — whether decided in a heartbeat or wrestled with for months or years — has carried weight.

What Jesus, our Teacher, wants us to understand is this: when we recognize that our decisions shape our lives... when we understand that we must treat every choice with care — some more than others... when we grasp that God the Father has ultimately ordained for us to make that very choice... when we know that His will is fulfilled through our decisions... then we, as God's children, can stand firm in what we decide — unlike the rest of the world.

And why can we stand firm? Because, like Jesus, we believe that nothing can stop God from accomplishing His plan in this reality. In other words, we trust the One who wills „our good — our eternal life.“

1.8. Therefore, as long as we live — and indeed, every moment of life is a series of decisions woven into God's plan for us — we must treat each one with seriousness.

Like Jesus, we must pray to the Father for wisdom, asking Him to show us what to do. And how does the Father give us wisdom? He gives us His Son as an example. The more deeply we take Jesus' teaching into our lives, the more clearly and wisely we'll know how to make our next decision. And when we finally make it, we'll know that it ultimately came from God, our Father. Of course, every decision we make must always align with God's goodness — that truth we must never forget.

APOSTLE

2. (Luke 6:13) **"And when day came, He called His disciples to Him and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles..."**

2.1. We read that when morning came, Jesus called all His disciples together and from among them chose twelve to be apostles. Before moving forward, we need to understand what the word apostle actually means. In Greek, *apostolos* most often translates as “one who is sent.” When we place that meaning in the context of this scene, we can conclude that Jesus was now choosing twelve men who would be sent out to carry out a special role within God’s plan for this reality.

2.2. As we study the Gospels, we see that Jesus often said the Father had sent Him to do His will. If Jesus Himself was “sent,” then He too is, in that sense, an apostle, isn’t He? I believe so. The apostle Paul viewed Jesus in this way, as we read in **(Hebrews 3:1)** “*Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession.*”

2.3. From the biblical record, we know that one of the twelve chosen apostles later betrayed Jesus — which means that, at that moment, eleven remained. In Acts 1:15–26 we read about an event where a group of around one hundred and twenty people, together with the eleven apostles, sought to choose between two candidates — Matthias and Barsabbas — to determine who would take Judas’ place as the twelfth apostle. They prayed for wisdom, cast lots, and the lot fell to Matthias. Thus, Matthias became the new twelfth apostle.

2.4. But if Matthias became the twelfth apostle, that raises the question: was Paul an apostle at all? Were there only twelve apostles in God’s plan? We know that the Church has always emphasized the number twelve — and Hollywood, too, has made much of that sacred number. But have we, throughout history, truly understood why twelve? I don’t know for certain. Yet one thing is clear — God never limited Himself to just twelve apostles. Paul was most definitely an apostle; Scripture makes that unmistakably clear¹.

2.5. So, why wasn’t Paul chosen as one of the twelve? First, because at that time, Paul — then known as Saul — wasn’t even “in the picture.” He was a Pharisee who persecuted the Church while the remaining eleven were seeking a replacement for Judas.

Second, in the eyes of those apostles, there was one key qualification: to be chosen as the twelfth apostle, a person had to have been a literal eyewitness to Jesus’ life — someone who had followed Him during His earthly ministry. Saul was not among them. While on his way to Damascus to arrest those who proclaimed faith in Jesus Christ, a voice from heaven spoke to him: “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*”² That was Saul’s first encounter with the risen Christ — and there, Jesus personally called him into His service. Yet Paul’s mission would be entirely different from that of the other twelve.

2.6. So, we have a thirteenth apostle — and I believe God can have, and has had, as many apostles as He chooses. An apostle, as we said earlier, is “one who is sent.” Sent by whom? By God. Sent for what purpose? To fulfill a unique role within the divine story that God Himself is unfolding in this reality.

¹ 1 Corinthians 1:1

² Acts 9:3-6; 22:6-10; 26:12-18

THE NUMBER 12

3. To understand why Jesus chose twelve apostles, we must think like a first-century Jew and grasp what that number meant to Israel. I believe the number twelve symbolically represented the twelve tribes of Israel — the chosen people of Yahweh³.

But now, as Jesus chooses twelve from within that chosen nation, He is signaling something new: a next step in the fulfillment of God's promises. These twelve men are not simply God's chosen people in a physical sense; they are a picture of what the twelve tribes are meant to become — people who love the Lord their God with all their heart, all their soul, all their mind, and all their strength.

3.1. From our perspective today, we know that through the prophets and the Book of Revelation, God promised that one day all twelve tribes — together with the twelve apostles and their King, the Messiah Jesus Christ — will fulfill those divine promises⁴. They will be a holy nation, promoting God's goodness, justice, and holiness throughout Israel.

And because of their strength in every respect — and the divine protection they will receive from their Messiah, who will represent the authority of the invisible God within the visible world — the rest of the nations will have no choice but to yield to their example of reflecting God's goodness.

3.2. That, I believe, is what Jesus wanted to demonstrate by choosing twelve apostles: God was moving forward with His promises. He was selecting twelve men who would stand as a living image before Israel — showing what the twelve tribes should look like in God's eyes if they truly desired Yahweh to establish His kingdom on earth.

3.3. Likewise, when God assigned each apostle a specific role, He also gave them a specific place where that mission would unfold. Church tradition tells us that various apostles carried the Gospel to places such as China, Russia, India, and Europe⁵. Whether that's historically accurate, I can't say for sure. But the one book I trust completely is Scripture. I suppose the world might call me a Biblically faithful believer — and I'll gladly accept that label. I believe what Scripture says, and I measure all other writings by it. If we take the Bible as a historical record of the apostles' movements, we see that most of the twelve spent their lives within Israel⁶, proclaiming the Gospel to their own people. And Paul — the thirteenth apostle — was the one who traveled across the vast Roman Empire, preaching the good news both to the Gentiles and to the Jews living among them⁷.

³ Genesis 35:10-12; 49:1-28; Exodus 24:4

⁴ Isaiah 11:12; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Ezekiel 37:21-22; Zechariah 14:9; Matthew 19:28; Revelation 7:4-9; 21:12-14

⁵ Among early Christian church traditions and various hagiographic sources, a number of claims appear regarding the missionary work of the apostles: According to tradition, the apostle Thomas carried out his ministry in India.

The apostle Bartholomew, tradition says, preached in India, Mesopotamia, and Armenia.

It is also said that the apostle Peter proclaimed the Gospel in Italy, particularly in Rome.

And some traditions maintain that the apostle Andrew ministered in the regions surrounding the Black Sea — ancient Scythia — which some interpret as areas of modern-day Eastern Europe or the lands north of the Black Sea.

However, it's important to note that these traditions often rest on weak or uncertain historical documentation. They belong more to the realm of *church tradition* than to that of verifiable historical record.

⁶The writings of the New Testament — the Gospels and the Book of Acts — focus primarily on Palestine, Judea, Samaria, and portions of the surrounding regions such as Galilee, Idumea, and Antioch.

⁷ Paul's missionary journeys are described in the Book of Acts (Acts 13–14; 15:36–18:22; 18:23–21:17; 27–28), where we read about his travels through Cyprus, Antioch, Galatia, Macedonia, Greece, Asia, and finally Rome.

THE CHOSEN ONES

4. Let's return to the text. Jesus called His disciples. How many disciples did Jesus have when He gathered them around Him? It is believed there were about seventy of them, both men and women. In (Luke 10:17) we read that seventy-two disciples returned from the mission to which Jesus had sent them earlier — to proclaim the Gospel in the towns He Himself intended to visit. So now, standing before Jesus are men and women who are His faithful followers. This was not a small group of people who accompanied Him in His ministry.

4.1. Let's meet the Twelve. At the beginning of the passage, we have Simon called Peter, his brother Andrew, James, and John. We've already spoken about these four. James and John were the sons of Zebedee, and their mother was among the close circle of women who followed Jesus⁸. As I mentioned in previous sermons, there are indications that Zebedee was a wealthy man — he had hired workers, and his sons James and John were likely his business partners. Their social status was quite high. We also know that Zebedee and his sons were acquaintances of the high priest Annas, and to be a household friend of a high priest meant belonging to the upper class⁹. Peter and Andrew worked in partnership with James and John, so they had known each other for some time — perhaps even since childhood. In any case, they were friends.

4.2. Next, we have Philip and Bartholomew. Philip was a close friend of Andrew's and came from the same town. Bartholomew is also known to us as Nathanael in the Gospel of John. Nathanael was one of Philip's close friends. Let's recall John 1:43–49, where Philip meets Nathanael and tells him they have found the One who was promised through Moses and the prophets. Nathanael, after a moment of doubt, decides to go with Philip to meet Jesus of Nazareth. When Jesus saw Nathanael, He said of him that he was a true Israelite in whom there was no deceit, and that He had seen him under the fig tree¹⁰. It's possible that Jesus prophetically saw Nathanael during a business transaction — and though Nathanael had the chance to deceive the other party, he didn't. That's why Jesus said there was no guile in him. Because of that prophetic statement, Nathanael came to believe that Jesus truly was the Son of God, the future King of Israel promised by the prophets.

4.3. Then we have Thomas and Matthew. Thomas was one of the apostles who decided to go fishing after Jesus' crucifixion¹¹. We know from the Synoptic Gospels that Thomas wasn't with the other apostles when Jesus first appeared to them after the resurrection. Thomas was probably a fisherman as well, perhaps even employed by Zebedee. If that's true, then we have seven men who worked in the same trade. Not only that — they were friends who had known each other even before becoming Jesus' followers. Then we have Matthew, also called Levi. We know that Matthew was a tax collector, and in Jewish culture, tax collectors were considered no better than prostitutes, criminals, or robbers — in other words, social outcasts to be avoided. And with reason: tax collectors often exploited their

⁸ Mark 15:40–41 (Salome, the mother of James and John, was among the women who followed Jesus and served Him — part of His closest circle of faithful followers.)

⁹ John 18:15–16 (Tradition and most biblical commentators hold that this "other disciple" was in fact John, the son of Zebedee. This means that John had personal access to the house of the high priest Annas (and Caiaphas) — confirming that the family of Zebedee possessed social influence and status.)

¹⁰ John 1:47

¹¹ John 21:1–3

people for personal gain. Yet, although Scripture doesn't say this explicitly, it's possible that Matthew wasn't like the others. Perhaps he carried out his duties honestly and didn't abuse his position.

4.4. Why do I think that's possible? In Luke 19:1–10 we read about another tax collector, Zacchaeus, who desperately wanted to see Jesus. He climbed a sycamore tree to get a better view, and Jesus approached him and said that He and His followers would dine at his house that very day. Zacchaeus received Him with joy and confessed publicly that he had stolen from his own people: *"I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone, I restore it fourfold."* What's the point of this example? Matthew, unlike Zacchaeus, never publicly confessed to having cheated his people, which may suggest that he never did. In other words, Matthew might have been an honest tax collector. If that's true, then the fishermen — Peter, Andrew, James, John, Thomas, Philip, and Nathanael — may have had a relatively good relationship with Matthew even before following Jesus. Perhaps their relationship, before they became disciples, was based on mutual respect. And if not, then the first months of living together in the group Jesus chose must have been quite interesting.

4.5. Moving on, next we have James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot. James is known in the Gospels as "James the Less" or "the Younger." In Mark 15:40 we see that his mother was also among the women who followed Jesus closely. Simon the Zealot, before becoming a disciple, belonged to a radical group known as the Zealots. The Greek word *zelotes* means "zealous one." They believed that serving any power other than Yahweh was idolatry. If any Jew did so, they considered him unworthy of belonging to the chosen people. The Jewish Zealots fought against Roman authority, organized guerrilla groups, and incited uprisings in the cities. The most extreme among them committed assassinations — their victims were not only Roman officials but also their Jewish collaborators. They carried small daggers (*sicae*) concealed beneath their garments, and for this reason, the Romans called them *sicarii* — "dagger-men." They would strike in crowded marketplaces, stab their target, and vanish into the masses. These various Zealot factions often fought among themselves with brutal methods to gain dominance. When they seized control of a region, they ruled through terror — not only against Roman sympathizers such as the Sadducees but also against those who opposed violent revolt, like most Pharisees. They were politically driven, and their ultimate goal was to overthrow Roman rule in the land God had given them. Simon the Zealot came from one such movement.

4.6. Next we meet Judas called Thaddeus — about him, we know very little. And finally, Judas Iscariot, most likely the only apostle from Judea, since all the others were from Galilee. We know, tragically, that Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus. Modern films often portray him as an educated man, fluent in several languages and politically minded. Perhaps he believed that by following Jesus, he would gain what he most desired — political power. Why did he think Jesus could give him that? Because Jesus was the future King of Israel, and as king, He would decide who would rule alongside Him. When Judas realized that Jesus wasn't going to establish a political kingdom, he turned to those who held power at the time — the priests in the Temple. That may well have been the case. But as we study the Gospels, we also see another possibility. Judas was the treasurer of the group that followed Jesus. All the money donated by wealthy men and women passed through his hands. The apostles refer to him as both a traitor and a thief¹². That's why there's a strong possibility that Judas was not driven by a hunger for political influence, but by greed. Perhaps he was simply a man in love with money — a desire that led him into corruption, stealing from those he lived with, from his

¹² John 12:4-6

brothers, and from the Messiah Himself. When Judas realized that Jesus' ministry was nearing its end — meaning the flow of money through his hands would soon stop — he decided to make a final profit while he still could. He betrayed his Master for a bag of silver given to him by the priests in the Temple.

4.7. And that brings us to the end of this sermon. Next time, we will begin with the most important message Jesus ever delivered to His people — and ultimately, to the whole world.