

Twelve Ordinary Men

Online Sermon: http://www.mckeesfamily.com/?page_id=3567

Even before the beginning of time the sovereign plan was for Jesus to be born, live amongst us and die for our sins (1 Peter 1:20). This had to be done for without atonement, God's righteous wrath (Romans 6:23) would forever remain on humanity, who despite their best efforts could not stop sinning (Romans 7)! For centuries the prophets and angels eagerly waited for the time and circumstances (1 Peter 1:10-12) in which Christ would empty Himself of His glory in heaven (Philippians 2:7) and offer flesh and blood the bread of life (John 6:35) needed for them to be adopted as royal priests (1 Peter 2:9), ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20) and children of His Father in heaven (Romans 8:14-17)! One would think this message would be gladly received and yet His proclamation, that entrance into the kingdom of God was not based on knowledge (Matthew 7:21-23) or lineage (Matthew 3:9) but on faith in His atoning sacrifice (Romans 3:25), was so profound that it provoked sharp criticism from His immediate family who thought He was crazy (Mark 3:21; John 7:5) and from those professed guardians of the law,¹ the scribes and Pharisees. Knowing that shortly after His death and resurrection He would return to heaven (John 14:3), to whom would the Lamb of God intrust His glorious message?

God Chooses the Weak

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

You would think that Jesus would pick the most powerful and influential people of His time to share such an important message. Would not one of Abraham's descendants, God's

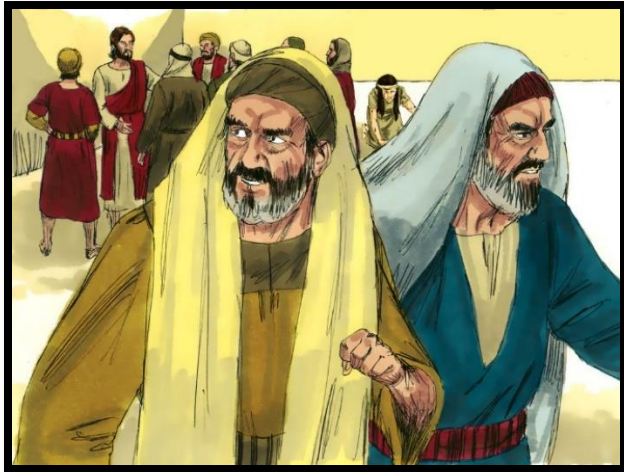


chosen people, Israel be the "right" ones to declare the truth concerning God's Son, Jesus? After all, with prophecies in hand would they not gladly make their paths straight (Isaiah 40:3) for He who promised to bind up the broken hearted, proclaim freedom to the captives (Isaiah 61:1-2) and circumcise their hearts with His very own Spirit (Ezekiel 36:22-28)? Surely those who had been waiting since the time of Jeremiah for a new covenant in which laws would be written on the minds and hearts (Jeremiah 31:31-34) of His people would be entrusted

¹ N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God*, vol 2 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 391.

to the experts in Jewish religion? And yet we are told that Jesus did not choose a single rabbi, scribe, Pharisee or Sadducee or even priest to be His apostle!²

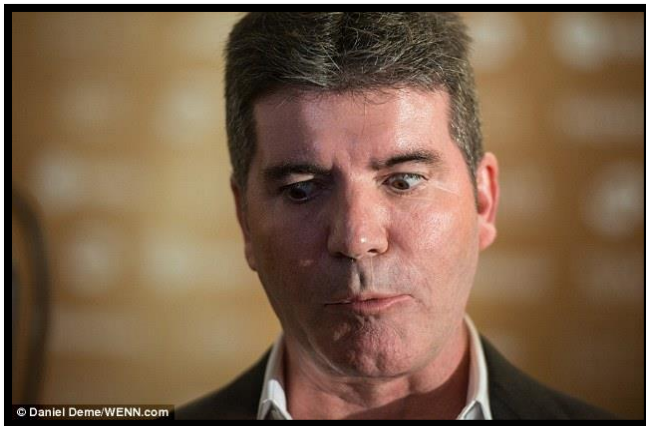
One reason why Jesus did not choose a single person from the established Jewish religion was due to their outright rejection of His message (John 1:11). Jesus had come to inaugurate a kingdom of God that challenged the traditional Jewish symbols of national identity, Torah and



Temple. Conflict with the Jewish leaders began in Galilee when: He associated with sinners (Mark 2:13-22), touched an unclean leper (Mark 1:40-45), forgave the sins of the paralytic (Mark 2:1-12), worked and healed on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23-28; 3:1-5), allowed His disciples to eat bread without washing their hands (Mark 7:1-23) and drove the money-changers out of the temple (John 2:13-16). The Jewish leaders simply could not accept any changes to the interpretation of the Torah nor could they accept any kingdom whose temple was destroyed (Luke 2:2-6) and entrance was

based not on lineage but on faith in a risen Savior (John 3:16)! They outright refused to accept a Messiah who had not come to overthrow Rome but instead allowed entrance of tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes (Matthew 21:31-32) and the Gentile dogs (Matthew 15:26)!

So, having rejected the religious leaders of God's own nation, whom would Jesus pick to carry on His message? **Would he pick you?** As a pastor I am forever trying to help the members of the church identify and use their spiritual gifts. I believe that it is only when the



members allow the emotions and dreams of their conscious and unconscious minds to be transformed by the power of His grace (Ephesians 3:20) that these living stones (1 Peter 1:5) will no longer view their God-given tasks as mundane, inconvenient and impossible (Matthew 19:26) but as one of many stepping stones towards accomplishing His audacious vision. While most Christians believe in spiritual gifts and the power of the Holy Spirit they often do not believe God will

chose them to perform miracles! Even when the calling is clear most have a litany of reasons as to why they are to be disqualified from service such as: "I am too shy," "I sin way too much," "I

² John F. MacArthur Jr., [*Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*](#) (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 7.

lack knowledge and wisdom,” and so on. If Jesus asked you this very moment to become a key leader in His kingdom would you be like Isaiah and say, “here I am, send me” (Isaiah 6:8)?

One thing that holds back many Christians is the mistaken belief that God chose the apostles because they were holier than everyone else. By displaying the apostles in larger than life, stained-glass windows inside the great cathedrals of Europe, has this not sent a message to all



Christians that they represent an exalted degree of spirituality?³ Were they not ordinary men? After all, they were not the spiritually elite when Jesus called them but were merely low-class, rural, uneducated, common people. When called seven of Jesus’ apostles were common fishermen, one was a former zealot determined to overthrow Rome, another was a tax collector whom would be viewed as a traitor to the Jews, and rest most likely tradesmen.⁴ And lest we think they were always holy in their behaviour, lets not forget

that they rejected His teachings through betrayal (14:10-11), desertion (14:50) and denial (14:66-72).⁵ After Peter denied Jesus three times, the disciples (except John) could not be found at the cross (15:22-41), the burial (15:42-47), or the tomb (16:1-8).⁶



Another thing that holds back many Christians from serving is the mistaken belief that their perceived, shortcomings disqualify them from serving in God’s kingdom. Even though the disciples failed to follow Jesus from time to time, most critics agree that the disciples are the characters in this story whom the Gospel’s readers should easily emphasize with because it allows them to identify with their own inadequacies.⁷ Ever feel that you have too little knowledge and understanding of the Bible and therefore should not teach,

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., [*Twelve Ordinary Men: How the Master Shaped His Disciples for Greatness, and What He Wants to Do with You*](#) (Nashville, TN: W Pub. Group, 2002), 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xii–xiii.

⁵ Mark Allan Powell, “*Toward a Narrative-critical Understanding of Mark.*” *Interpretation* 47, no. 4 (October 1993): 344.

⁶ Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark – Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 44.

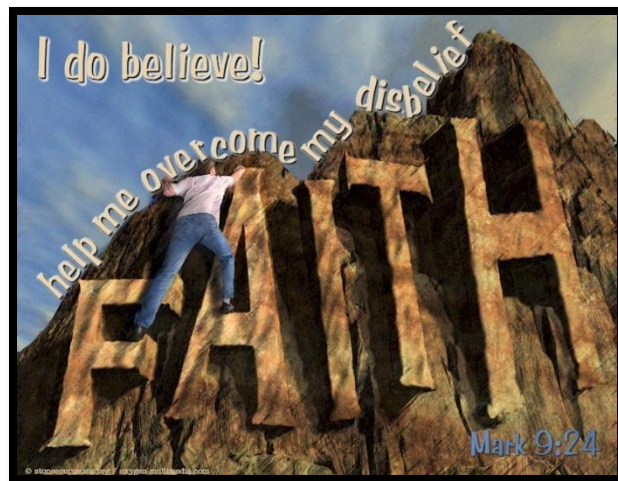
⁷ Mark Allan Powell, 345.

preach or evangelize? Surely God only wants those who have memorized Scripture and know Hebrew and Greek to reach out to the lost souls of this world? If this were true, then why did Christ choose twelve uneducated men to be His apostles? They were far from the academic elite for even Christ described them as dull and lacking in understanding (Matthew 15:16-17). Even though they received the most intense and arguably the best seminary education possible by the Master, we too have been given excellent training from Sunday School teachers, pastors, deacons, worship leaders and have access to excellent commentaries. Just like the apostles there will be times in which we will lack the right words to say but in those cases, we are to rely on the Holy Spirit and He will give the right words to say (Luke 12:11-12)! Knowledge then does not come from just learning but also is imparted by His Spirit.

Another perceived inadequacy that Christians use as an excuse to not serve is their apparent lack of humility. While most would not say “I cannot serve because I think too highly of myself,” they are more than willing to say that their self-absorbed, self-centered, self-promoting and



arrogance are legitimate reasons to be excluded from serving in God’s kingdom. I have heard many say pastor don’t ask me to serve for the old self has not yet died and I still love this world more than I should. Also, I often don’t get along with others because I arrogantly want to get my own way! Before you quickly run away let me remind you that the apostles spent an enormous amount of time arguing who would be the greatest amongst them (Matthew 20:20-29, Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46) and even asked Jesus what was to be their reward for serving Him (Matthew 19:27).⁸ Arrogance and self-absorption are not legitimate excuses to not serve but merely sins that must be repented and replaced with servant’s heart! Even though the apostles initially wrestled with denying self they later learned how to put the welfare of others above themselves (Philippians 2:3), even in the face of their own death!

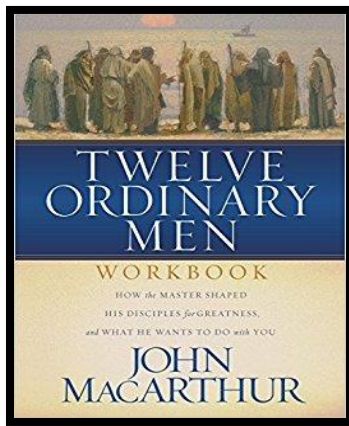


The most common perceived inadequacy that Christians use as an excuse to not serve is their lack of faith. “Since I do not yet have the faith that can move the mighty mountains of your kingdom, Lord please choose someone else!” Have you ever made this statement? Did you know that the apostles often lacked faith as well? Due to

⁸ John F. MacArthur Jr., 25.

their unbelief and hardness of their hearts (Mark 16:14), Jesus frequently described the apostles as either having little (Matthew 6:30; 14:31; 16:8) or no faith (Mark 4:40).⁹ We all have times in our lives when our faith is weak. For example, when we pray for deliverance from tribulations only to be told that “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9); we often respond not with rejoicing that perseverance will lead to spiritual growth (James 1:1-2) but instead with unbelief that God will help us! This lack of faith weighs heavy on our minds and is often used as an excuse to not serve. Instead of saying “I lack faith choose someone else,” should we not be like the father of the boy possessed by an unclean spirit and cry out Lord, help me overcome my mountain of unbelief (Mark 9:24).

I want to conclude by saying that the above inadequacies relate to an overall lack of perceived power to do God’s will. We simply believe we are too spiritually weak to be of any use



to serve inside of God’s kingdom! If natural strength is a prerequisite to serving in God’s kingdom then why did Jesus choose twelve men with little education, humility and faith? He chose them because His power was to be made perfect in our weakness so that the miracles that we do in His name will be accredited to Him and not to us! If one truly believes in the power of the Holy Spirit, then service is not about what we can do but instead whether we are willing to be an open vessel that Jesus can work through! How amazing it is that Jesus chose the foolish to forever shame the wise of this world (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). We learn more as we go through this series please refer to John MacArthur’s book Twelve Ordinary Men! For the rest of this

series we are going to examine the lives of each of the twelve apostles, not only celebrating their accomplishments but also inviting ourselves to serve like they did!

⁹ John F. MacArthur Jr., 26.