

# The Mountain, the Apostles, and the Traitor

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## Introduction

### The Text

<sup>12</sup>In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. <sup>13</sup>And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: <sup>14</sup>Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, <sup>15</sup>and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, <sup>16</sup>and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. (Luke 6:12–16)

### The Outline

- A. I have no introduction for us this morning apart from pointing out that this text provides us with a staggering, troubling, awe-inspiring chain of events.
  - 1. We will follow Luke’s narrative here through three headings: (1) The Mountain (v. 12); (2) The Apostles (vv. 13-16a); and (3) The Traitor (v. 16b). I hope you’re ready!

## (1) The Mountain (v. 12)

### In these Days . . .

- A. Our text begins with the contextual note: “In these days . . .”—which begs the question: In what days? What are “these days” to which Luke is referring?
- B. Well, if you’ve been tracking with us in Luke’s gospel up to this point, you know that “these days” for Jesus have been days of increasing opposition and conflict. Immediately following His baptism and entrance into public ministry, opposition and conflict have been intensifying at every turn.
  - 1. In 4:1-13, the Holy Spirit thrusts Him into the wilderness to do combat with the devil himself.
  - 2. Then, in 4:16-30, it’s His hometown boys that rise up against Him in the synagogue and attempt to kill Him for the message He was preaching.
  - 3. So Jesus leaves for Galilee where, at first, the crowds are “amazed” at His authority over the demonic realm (4:31-37). But this amazement quickly gives way to anger and accusation, in particular from the religious authorities of His day:
    - a. 5:21: “And the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, saying, ‘Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?’”
    - b. 5:30: “And the Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples, saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’”
    - c. 6:2: “But some of the Pharisees said, ‘Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?’”

- d. And, finally in 6:11, we read that, after Jesus heals a brother's withered right hand on the Sabbath, "[The Scribes and Pharisees] were filled with fury and discussed with on another what they might do to Jesus."
- C. And it's immediately following this in v. 11, that Luke pens v. 12: "In these days . . ."
- 1. So these have been days of increasing opposition and conflict. These have been days when the new things arriving in Christ have been coming under fire from the old things established in Israel.

## The Mountain All Night

- A. And, therefore, to finish Luke's sentence here: "In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God" (v. 12).
- B. Let me ask you something: Where do you go when life gets rough? When conflict and opposition are on the rise? When you're hurting or you're feeling hopeless? Where do you go?
- 1. We see where Jesus goes. To the mountain, all night, to talk to His Father.
- C. The two contextual details given here in v. 12 are worth some reflection.

### (1) The Mountain

- A. First, Jesus "went out to the mountain . . ."
- B. When we think of going up into the mountains we think of getting away. I mentioned this last time, right? We can breathe a bit freer up there. We can see a bit clearer. Sometimes you're too close to a situation to see it rightly. Getting away with the Lord reorients us and reenergizes us for mission.
- C. To give you an example from my own life. This is why I love to run in the hills around here. Here's a little secret for you: I don't love to run in the hills because I love to run. I love to run in the hills because I love the Lord. It's about getting away with the Lord.
- 1. Put me on a treadmill, or a track, or even the street, and I hate running. But put me in the hills and my spirit sings! Because, in the hills, I'm away from my usual context, from other people, from my to-do list, and I can hear my Father's voice clearer than anywhere else.
    - a. Now I'm not trying to get all animistic on you, like the hills are talking to me or something. I'm just saying we've got to get away from what we're doing sometimes so we can get God's direction for what we should do when we get back in it.
      - i. The way I put this a few sermons back, if you remember, is we've got to get out into the Desolate Place if we're going to get a sense of the Divine Imperative for our lives.
- D. So Jesus heads up to the mountain to be with His Father.

## (2) All Night

- A. But, second contextual detail, if you notice, He's not on the mountain during the day, He's on the mountain "all night".
- B. I don't know quite what it would be like around Galilee where Christ was at, but around here spending all night in the hills sounds a bit frightening.
  - 1. At night is when the mountain lions roam. I've seen people's security cameras with footage of a mountain lion strutting the streets of my neighborhood.
  - 2. At night is when coyotes howl. I'll hear these guys, after they've made a kill, filling the night with their war cries. Just carnage going on. Some poor family probably just lost their little Pomeranian or whatever. You've got to keep little Schnooky on a leash. It gets crazy out there at night!
- C. But, and here is the critical point, while the nighttime is perhaps a bit more frightening, it is also a bit more freeing. Night is the time when, in the words of that old hymn: "the things of earth [quite literally] . . . grow strangely dim."
  - 1. "I can't see the things of earth anymore. I can't do my work anymore. I can't distract myself with my possessions anymore. No one else is up to talk to. I can get alone with my Father!"
    - a. And, perhaps, we'll find that we see clearer in the night than we could ever see in the day.
- D. I saw it a couple of days ago—the endgame of all our worldly pursuits. There was a man sitting on a chair in his front driveway. His Lamborghini was parked next to him—cherry red. The sun was shining, the birds were singing, the spring flowers were in bloom. And do you want to know what he was doing? Polishing his golf clubs—pulling them out one by one, and polishing them, presumably so that he could pack them up in his Lamborghini and go play the day away.
  - 1. That my friends is the goal of millions, upon millions, upon billions of people!
    - a. And Jesus is saying: "Turn out the lights on that. Pull the plug on the American dream. I don't want to be distracted with the things of this earth. Reorient and reenergize my heart, Father, for the mission, for the plan you have for Me—even if that plan is hard!"
- E. So when the going gets tough for Jesus, He goes up to the mountain all night to pray. He's in the desolate place, in the darkest hour, meeting with His Father.
  - 1. Are we there with Him?

## (2) The Apostles (vv. 13-16a)

## A Clear Choice in the Day

- A. After this night on the mountain in prayer, Jesus is clear on what He needs to do next: “And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles” (v. 13).
- B. Here we are reminded that not everyone has responded to Jesus with opposition. He has “disciples”.
  - 1. It’s the religious and political elite, by and large, that have a problem with Him. Because He’s challenging the status quo, and the status quo is going pretty good for them.
  - 2. But the losers, the lepers, the lame, the sick, the demoniacs, the tax collectors and sinners, they’re all stoked on Him, because He’s offering a way out.
- C. And Jesus calls this ragtag group of disciples to Himself and chooses from among them twelve “whom He named apostles.”

## What Is an Apostle?

- A. Perhaps the first thing we must do here is focus in on that word “apostle”. This word in English is just a transliteration of the word in Greek *apostolos*, which is itself a noun derived from the verb *apostello*, which according to the industry standard Greek lexicon means: “to dispatch someone for the achievement of some objective, to send out” (BDAG).
  - 1. So this word “apostle” may be a noun grammatically, but it has at its core the rumbling energy of a verb.
    - a. Dutch theologian Herman Ridderbos defines the apostle this way: “It denotes an ambassador with a special mission who acts on behalf of a person, represents him and has been given full powers and authority for this purpose” (Coming Kingdom, p. 370).
- B. Mark’s account of our text in Luke brings all of this together: “<sup>13</sup> [H]e went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. <sup>14</sup> And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach <sup>15</sup> and have authority to cast out demons” (3:13–15).
  - 1. To be chosen and named an apostle is to be both drawn near to Him with special access and sent out by Him with special authority!

## Why Choose Twelve Apostles?

- A. Now that we have a sense of what an apostle even is, we want to ask the question: Why twelve?
  - 1. Certainly there are strategic reasons for this move. The Pharisees want to kill Him. To ensure the success of His mission even after He’s gone, He will need to multiply Himself into certain men and appoint them as His successors.

2. There are pragmatic reasons for choosing twelve. For it would be impossible to multiply Himself into all of His disciples. He must focus in on a few—on twelve, or even more narrowly, as we shall see later, on three.
- B. But, most importantly, we get a sense that His selection of twelve is not merely strategic or pragmatic, it is symbolic. Twelve. Why twelve exactly? He could've chosen seven or ten and still have been just as strategic and pragmatic. So, again, why twelve exactly?
- C. For those of us who know our OT, does that number strike you as significant in any way? O it does, doesn't it! For when YHWH initially sought to redeem a people and form them around Himself, how many tribes did He choose? Twelve. The twelve tribes of Israel.
1. Implication: Christ is forming a new covenant community, a new Israel, a new people of God, a new humanity around Himself—beginning with these twelve apostles. All that was pictured in Israel is finding its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.
- D. If you're questioning me on this point, consider [Rev 21:12, 14](#). John the apostle is given a vision of the end of things. He sees a new heavens and a new earth. And then He sees a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven. Writing of this city John records: “<sup>12</sup> It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed . . . <sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”
1. Notice first the parity between the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 apostles of the Lamb. Clearly a link is being made here between the two.
    - a. We are not reading into Jesus' selection of 12 back in [Luke 6](#). John comes in to confirm: God wants us to see the parity between the two communities.
      - i. The OT work of God is organically related to the NT work of God. There is a unity in both the plan and people of God.
  2. But there is more than parity here. I think we are intended to note the superiority of this apostolic community to the Old Covenant community that came before. This is hinted at in that, while the names of the twelve tribes of Israel are inscribed on the “gates”, the names of the twelve apostles are inscribed on the “foundations”.
    - a. This hint is made plain for us by Jesus' own words given in [Luke 22:28-30](#). Speaking to His apostles, He says: “<sup>28</sup> You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, <sup>29</sup> and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, <sup>30</sup> that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”
      - i. The twelve tribes of Israel will answer to the twelve apostles of the Lamb.
- E. Jesus is moving the plan of God forward into its final stage, and is constituting around Himself a new Israel, an end-time Israel, now composed of men and women from every tribe, tongue, and nation.

1. To the Galatian churches Paul writes: “<sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.<sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring . . . [and as Paul would put it later in 6:16: you are] . . . the Israel of God” (3:28-29).
  - a. It’s your relationship to Christ, believing in Christ, belonging to Christ, that’s the issue. If you are in Him than you are a citizen of the New Jerusalem and headed for glory!

F. And He’s beginning this international, this universal, work with these twelve apostles.

## Jesus Has So Much Hope for Us

- A. Before we move on, can I just point out one beautiful implication that flows from all of this? I want you to know that Jesus has so much more hope for us than we even have for ourselves, or for one another for that matter.
  1. This is not the crew I’m picking if I’m trying to leave a legacy, if I’m trying to multiply myself, right? This is not the crew I’m hand-selecting to begin a new humanity with.
    - a. I’m wanting the smart, the rich, the famous, the strong, the self-sufficient, the self-motivated, the beautiful. I don’t want these guys. They’re just going to slow Me down and make me look bad.
- B. But Jesus has so much more hope for us than we do. Not because He sees our hidden potential or whatever, but because He knows what He’s capable of. It’s not my capabilities here, but His.
  1. “You don’t think I can build my church with a group of wishy-washy men like Peter? Watch Me. I’ll make it so strong not even the gates of hell can prevail against it. Even Satan can’t stop what I’m about to do with these men, with my church” ...what He’s doing with you, and with me.
- C. And you know what, when Jesus makes somebodies of nobodies, in the end, those nobodies don’t make Him look bad, they make Him look amazing, as He is. Because everyone looking on knows they couldn’t have done this. This must be a God thing.
  1. Do you remember what the Jewish leaders said of Peter and John? “Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).
    - a. Jesus can do amazing things with common men and women!
- D. If you’re feeling washed up, broken, sinful here this morning, you’re in good company. Jesus begins the new humanity with a small group of twelve people just like you. There’s hope for us here, because of Him!

### (3) The Traitor (v. 16b)

#### But How?

- A. But how's He going to do it? How's He going to pioneer a new humanity, a new Israel, a new people of God?
  - 1. Well, the answer is given somewhat subtly in the very last words of our text. Following v. 13 we are given the list of men Jesus chooses and names as His apostles, and concluding this list in v. 16b is: "Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor."
- B. Here is perhaps the most captivating detail in our text. Responding to the rising opposition of the religious establishment in Israel, Jesus organizes a new community, a new Israel, around Himself. But intriguingly, from within this new community will arise the sharpest opposition of all!
  - 1. It's not just opposition from people out there anymore, it's opposition from within. "He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me" (John 13:18).
  - 2. It's not just the rejection of enemies anymore. It's the betrayal of a friend. "Friend, do what you came to do" (Matt 26:50).
  - 3. One of the twelve will take Him down.
    - a. And in His death, we come alive!

#### The Chain of Events

- A. We cannot miss the chain of events identified in our text: Jesus chooses Judas after spending all night on a mountain in prayer with His Father.
- B. Surely we are tempted to think that Jesus must have misheard, He got the wrong guy, He messed up.
  - 1. But the Scriptures will not permit such an interpretation here. No! Quite the opposite, in fact.
    - a. Instead, we come to see that God means for us to make this connection between Jesus' prayers on the mountain and His selection of Judas the traitor so that we can be sure of one thing in particular: However much the cross can be ascribed to the wicked intentions of sinful men, it is above all else to be ascribed to the redemptive intentions of a gracious God.
      - i. God's grace is not accidental, it is sovereign. And the cross is not God's afterthought it is His plan from all eternity.
- C. Jesus chose Judas, because the Father told Him to, because "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son . . ." (John 3:16). And the Son, wrestling in prayer on the mountain in the night, found strength from His Father to obey.
  - 1. And He went to the cross for you, and for me.