

The Master's Men (Pt. 2)

Luke 6:14b-15a

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for May 23, 2021

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Summary: As Jesus continues to call those followers whom he will call his closest disciples, Stephen Davey uncovers some timeless principles that we can use in our own walks as disciples of the Lord. We can take encouragement from the status, talents, and abilities (or the lack thereof) of these disciples as we humbly accept God's calling for our lives today.

I have read that Longfellow could write a few rhyming lines on a piece of paper and move a generation; we call that poetic genius.

Rockefeller could sign his name to a blank check, and it would be worth millions; that's called powerful affluence.

Monet could splash paint on a canvass, and it would become a masterpiece; that's called artistic brilliance.

None of them compare to the life-changing mastery of Jesus Christ, who will take ordinary disciples and transform them into co-laborers and future heirs of the kingdom; that's called amazing grace.

Let's go back to Luke's Gospel, where the Lord has determined, in chapter 6, to spend the second half of His ministry developing, composing, and investing His grace in the lives of 12 men.

Luke gives us one of four lists that appear in the New Testament, and in each list, as we've learned, the disciples are almost always listed in the same order with Peter first and Judas Iscariot last.

Fifty years ago, William Barclay, in his commentary on Luke's Gospel, called them twelve ordinary men.

William Barclay, [The Gospel of Luke](#) (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 75

And that's all they were, but they have been called to begin wearing the dust of the Master—to walk so closely with Jesus that they become covered with the dust kicked up by His sandals.

Now we made a couple of observations in our last study, that I want to repeat today to get a running start.

The first observation was this:

Jesus chose His disciples not because He needed them, but because they needed *Him*.

Darrel L. Bock, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Luke 1-11* (Baker, 1994), p. 447

And secondly:

Jesus chose His disciples not because of who they were, but because of who they would *become*.

Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Luke* (Zondervan, 2012), p. 150

Simon Peter and his older brother Andrew illustrated this so well as you track their discipleship, and their development, and their ministry into the early days of the church.

Now let me add a third principle here and then we'll move on to meet a few more of these ordinary men.

Thirdly:

The disciples were not chosen because of what they knew, but because they were *willing to be taught*.

Among the twelve, the Lord chooses two more fishermen—another set of biological brothers—who have a lot to learn: James and John; the oldest of the two brothers was James.

Even though he was older, he will never appear in a scriptural setting acting alone; he always shows up alongside his brother John. In fact, most of the time, James and John are seen together, so let me introduce them together.

James and John are the sons of Zebedee, ***Luke tells us in chapter 5***. Zebedee seems to be a man of influence and stature in the community—more than likely the owner of the fishing enterprise managed by his sons. They are fishing partners with Simon Peter and his older brother Andrew.

Zebedee's entire family were well-to-do and connected in some way—perhaps by generous contributions—to the Temple. We know that because John was known to the High Priest and admitted into his courtyard when Jesus was arrested (John 18).

We often overlook the fact that John was in that courtyard along with Peter, along with those nosy people and that noisy rooster.

There is evidence from early church records that Zebedee was a Levite and related to the high priest's family.

John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (W Publishing Group, 2002), p. 78

I say all of that to point out that James and John leave their family business, and whatever good standing they had with the religious world, and they become disciples of an itinerate, unconnected, impoverished teacher.



Why would it have been especially difficult for James and John to follow Jesus, given their elevated earthly status?

And what's more, they are among the closest of the Lord's disciples.

Luke will record for us that James and John are invited by the Lord into that little girl's bedroom where they are able to witness the Lord resurrecting Jairus' daughter back to life (**Luke 8:51**).

They will be invited by the Lord to join Him on the mount where they witness His transfiguration—that moment when the divine glory of Christ is manifested in spectacular brilliance and light (**Luke 9:28**).

It was a staggering display of who Jesus really was. In fact, when they came back down the mountain, the Lord told Peter, James, and John not to inform the other disciples about what they had seen until *after* His resurrection (**Mark 9:9**).

The trouble is that all of this went to their heads. And they spent the next five hours walking to Capernaum debating with the disciples about who would be the greatest among them.

James and John were convinced they were now among the elite. They're arguing back and forth on the road, "I'm the greatest! No, I'm the greatest! No, I'll be the greatest!"

Somewhere in here, the mother of James and John gets involved and asks the Lord to let her boys sit on thrones on either side of Him when the kingdom comes.

You just have to love mom here. And James and John—these two mama's boys—probably put her up to it. There is

evidence that the mother of James and John was related to Mary, the mother of Jesus—possibly her sister—which would make these brothers and Jesus first cousins.

This is the way it works: use every connection you've got to get to the front of the line, to get that promotion, to make it to the top.

It happens today, perhaps where you work. Washington insiders call it "Potomac Fever." One senator wrote that whenever a new president is elected, we're all waiting, negotiating, coveting some position, some appointment, some sweet promotion.

Well, James and John have a severe case of Potomac Fever.

Luke also tells us that these brothers aren't just ambitious, they are somewhat ruthless. They will earn the nickname from Jesus— "**The sons of thunder**"—in **Luke 9:54**.

And that wasn't necessarily a compliment.

Jesus is preaching in a Samaritan town and the citizens refuse to believe the Lord, and James and John effectively say to the Lord, "Let's give it to them! Let's call down fire and burn this town to the ground."

How's that for an evangelism strategy? If they don't believe you, torch them. In other words, why wait for the fires of hell later, let's bring it on and let them have it now!

This fiery, passionate, no-holds-barred approach will be transformed over time into perseverance under pressure and commitment that will refuse to give in or back down or give up.

James will be the first of the disciples to die. He is imprisoned by Herod Agrippa and then becomes the first of the twelve to be martyred.

But the disciple who had wanted fire to fall from heaven on the enemies of the gospel was now a different man.

Clement of Alexandria writes that the Roman soldier who brought James into the courtroom of Herod and heard James defend his faith was so personally moved and convicted that, as he was leading James to the place of execution, he asked James to forgive him. And James quietly said to him, “Peace be with you.” To which this soldier professed his belief in Christ and Clement said that both men were then executed at the same time for their faith in Christ.

Adapted from MacArthur, p. 93

John the apostle will live longer than his brother. In fact, longer than any other apostle; he will be the last of the twelve to die as an old man.

He will go on to write the Gospel of John, First, Second and Third John and the Book of Revelation, while suffering exile on the island of Patmos.

In his 90s, he describes in Revelation his tour of Heaven; the singing of the hosts of Heaven; the Father’s house of gold; the throne of God with lightning flashing all

around it as it sat on a sea that looked like glass.

What’s missing in this old disciple is ambition and resentment. In fact, John eventually developed a brand-new nickname over the years—a nickname used by the church and to this day—he is known not as a son of thunder, but as the Apostle of Love.

John will write more than any other New Testament author on this subject; he will use the word “love” more than 80 times in his writing.

Ibid, p. 96

One author summarized what he described as John’s theology of love. John is the one who writes **that:**

- God is a God of love (1 John 4:8);
- God loves the world (John 3:16);
- God the Father loves His Son (John 5:20);
- God the Father loves His Son’s disciples (John 14:21);
- Jesus, God’s Son, loves His disciples (John 15:12);
- The followers of Jesus love Him in return (John 14:15);
- All believers should love one another (John 13:35);
- The distinguishing mark of a disciple of Christ happens to be love (John 13:35).

Adapted from MacArthur, p. 116

The dominant theme of a man who had wanted to incinerate unbelievers, who argued and coveted to be first and foremost, is now a gracious, caring, loving old man.

James and John learned well; they wore well the dust of their Master teacher.

Next, Luke mentions in his list a disciple by the name of Philip.

Let me introduce him by giving you another principle to tuck away for encouragement:

The Lord chose His disciples, not because of their impressive *ability*, but because of their *availability*.

Which my mother drummed into our hearts while growing up: availability is *the* greatest ability.

No other disciple fleshes this out any more than the next disciple in the list. His name is Philip.

Now you might confuse him with the Philip who plays a prominent role in the early church, in the ***Book of Acts and chapter 6; this Philip*** became a deacon and then in ***chapter 8*** a rather famous evangelist among the Samaritans, holding rallies and performing miracles with hundreds of people coming the faith in Christ. This Philip was whisked away by the Spirit of God to witness to an Ethiopian statesman who was riding in his chariot, puzzling over what he was reading from the scroll of Isaiah.

Don't confuse this Philip, the deacon/evangelist, with Philip the apostle.

Philip the deacon was much more dynamic.

We know very little about Philip the apostle. In fact, the only thing we know about him comes from four brief sentences scattered among four chapters in the Gospel of John (1:43-46; 6:5-7; 12:20-24; 14:7-10).

G. Campbell Morgan, [The Great Physician](#) (Fleming Revell, 1937), p. 4

In his classic work on the disciples, published in 1937, G. Campbell Morgan writes that Philip was simply an unimpressive man. Coming from the same town as Peter and Andrew, more than likely attending the same synagogue and known to them, it's quite possible that they would have wondered why Philip had been chosen.

Ibid

He seemed quick to grab on to facts, the physical reality of things; but he was slow to grab on to the miraculous possibility of things.

He was what another author called a "facts-and figures kind of guy." He went by-the-book; he wanted to figure everything out; he was the bean counter among the disciples.

Adapted from MacArthur, p. 121 & 125

If the calculator had been invented back then, Philip would have owned two of them.

There's one classic scene where he shows up individually and has an opportunity to demonstrate faith in the miraculous power of Christ.

In fact, Jesus is about to test him personally. Now this test wasn't to discourage Philip, it was intended to develop Philip.

And it takes place after the Lord has been preaching in the open air to as many as 15,000 people, if not more. The men alone are estimated by the Apostle John to number around 5,000 (John 6:10).

Well, it's getting late, and this massive crowd has had nothing to eat. And Jesus turns to Philip and:

Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

John 6:5b-6

In other words, "Philip, how in the world are we going to be able to buy enough bread to feed all these people?"

Philip's probably wondering, "Why am I the one getting this pop quiz?" More than likely because he was from this region and knew where the bakery was, and even more likely, because he had become the apostolic administrator; he was the one that figured everything out.

I can see Philip pulling out his scratch pad, "Let's see, 5,000 men, women, children. . . carry the two—Lord, we don't

have the money; there's no way we can feed this crowd."

And right about then, Andrew shows up and says, "Hey, I found a little boy who's willing to donate his lunch; he's got, let's see, fives little pieces of barley bread and two little pickled fish."

And Philip is probably thinking, "Andrew, you're out of your mind! That'll never work!"

It's almost as if Jesus aims this miracle at the heart of Philip. It isn't what you can see; it isn't what you can calculate; it isn't how much you have in the bank; it isn't how much you can figure out.

It's what you place into the hands of the Master artist, by faith in Him alone.

And you say, "Lord, I can't figure this one out; there's no way through this dilemma; there doesn't seem to be a way through this impossible situation. I've got all the facts in front of me; I've calculated all the options, but this one is beyond me."

And the Lord moves forward with even the smallest gesture of faith, like the offering here of a ridiculously inadequate suggestion, "Hey, this kid has a lunch."

The Lord doesn't need impressive offerings, impressive people, impressive faith; he just needs availability and the offering of something so simple—like a little boy's lunch.



Describe a moment in your life where God demonstrated his power to you, despite your lack of faith in Him.

Jesus chose a facts-and-figures, methodical, organized, ordinary person to be His disciple.

Let me add a principle here before moving on:

Jesus doesn't choose disciples with the same personalities; He plans to reach different kinds of people in many different places.

Philip never forgot this lesson of facing impossibilities and simply remaining available.

He will pioneer the gospel into modern day Turkey, where he will eventually be stoned to death, but not before leading multitudes to faith in Christ through his careful and faithful witness.

Luke's Gospel now mentions next the apostle **Bartholomew**. We're told in John's Gospel that Philip brought Bartholomew to meet Jesus.

Bartholomew is Aramaic, with what we might call a last name. Bar means son—he was the son of Tholomew, or more accurately, Tolmai.

The Gospels of Mathew, Mark and Luke refer only to Bartholomew, and never

mention Nathaniel. The Gospel of John refers only to Nathaniel and never mentions Bartholomew. However, all four Gospels pair him with Philip.

Morgan, p. 49

Which help confirm this apostle's name was Nathaniel Bartholomew; or Nathaniel, the son of Tolmai.

Now if you didn't think there was much to read about Philip, you have even less about Nathaniel.

In fact, to this day, we've uncovered no history of Nathaniel and we do not have any account of his family life or his father or mother, beyond his name.

Adapted from Morgan, p. 49

Just a few phrases appear in the Scriptures about him.

Jesus will commend Nathaniel as an authentic Israelite, **one in whom is no deceit (John 1:47)**. In other words, Nathaniel doesn't have an agenda in coming to Jesus; he's not hiding ulterior motives.

However, Nathaniel goes down in history as being the disciple for saying something rather embarrassing. When he was told by Philip that they had found the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, Nathaniel responds bluntly by saying:

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

John 1:46b

How would you like that on your spiritual resume?

That's like saying today, "Hey, we have found the Messiah, He's from Raleigh," or more like: "He's from Chapel Hill—can anything good come out of there? I doubt it."

That's essentially what Nathaniel is saying: "Look, I don't know where the Messiah will come from, but it won't be Nazareth."

But then, when Jesus demonstrates His omniscience to Nathaniel and says, "I saw you the other day under the fig tree; essentially, I knew what you were thinking about yesterday," Nathaniel is completely blown away; he responds to the Lord by saying:

*You are the Son of God!
You are the King of Israel!*

John 1:49b

I love this guy! "I will believe in You right here, and right now!" He was that quick to follow Christ.

We know of no other family member who came along with him; we know nothing of his education, his roots, his past, or his pedigree.

Let me put something into principle form here:

The Lord does not choose disciples because of their spiritual heritage, He chooses them to *begin* a spiritual heritage.

Maybe you can identify with him today. You're the first of your entire family and extended family to follow Christ. Maybe you're the only one in your family and extended family to believe the gospel and become a disciple of Jesus.

Don't be discouraged about your future or your ministry potential.

God isn't handicapped by your past; He isn't hindered in his plans for your life because you're not a second or third or fourth generation believer.

You've just accepted His call and you are now wearing His dust as you walk in the footsteps of your Savior.

It didn't handicap Nathaniel either. It didn't slow him down. He will go on to reach into northern Iran and touch up into southern Russia with the gospel.

He will eventually be martyred for his faith, leaving a legacy behind of faithfulness to Christ.

Let me briefly mention two more disciples.

Luke mentions next in his list the apostle Matthew. Now Matthew has already made an appearance in our exposition through Luke.

He had become a traitor to his people to become a tax collector, representing the empire of Rome.

He would have nothing to do with Israel; he would effectively abandon his people and they would be happy to abandon him.

If there was anyone less qualified to follow Christ, the King of Israel—as Nathaniel just called Him—it would have been a tax collector who didn't care about Israel.

He cared about the Emperor of Rome, not the ruler of Israel.

So, Matthew is disqualified from the get-go. Jesus looks like He's making a mistake here.

But here's what's happening, again, let me put into principle form:

Jesus did not call qualified people; He called people and *then* qualified them.

And what I find intriguing is that the Lord will so change the heart of Matthew that Matthew will eventually write the Gospel of Matthew, primarily to reach the nation of Israel with the truth that Jesus Christ was indeed their King.

Finally, let me introduce you to the disciple called Thomas.

Keep in mind that some of these disciples have much more said about them and we will hear more from them as we continue through the Gospel by Luke, and Thomas is one of them.

For now, I want to point out one event that's not as well known.

But first, let's deal with his nickname. If you're older in the faith, you know that an adjective has tagged Thomas—sort of like Rahab got permanently tagged with Rahab the Harlot.

Thomas' nickname precedes his name, it starts with the letter "D" and ends with "ing."

Doubting Thomas. Yes, he's been tagged with that for 2,000 years.

Yes, his glass was always half-empty instead of half-full; yes, he was melancholy.

By the way, Thomas is also referred to as Thomas Didymus, in John 11:16, which means "Thomas the Twin." We're not told if he had a twin brother or sister, only that he was a twin.

A.B. Bruce, [The Training of the Twelve](#) (Zondervan, 1871; reprint 1963), p. 33

What we do know is that he was quick to believe in the Lord's promise of His coming death; but he was slow to believe in the Lord's promise of His resurrection.

Adapted from Morgan, p. 33

But I think we pin too much on Thomas. We're clearly told in Scripture that none of the disciples believed Jesus had risen from the dead.

Mark's Gospel says that when Mary Magdalene ran to tell the disciples that she had seen the risen Lord, the Bible says:

She went and told those who had been with him, as they mourned and wept.

But when they heard that he was alive and had been seen by her, they would not believe it.

Mark 16:10-11

None of them believed it.

But the reason you can call Thomas, “Daring Thomas” just as much as “Doubting Thomas” is because early on, he becomes the first disciple to say that he’s willing to die for Christ.

It took place in John’s Gospel account; the Jewish leaders are threatening to stone Jesus to death for claiming to be God incarnate.

In **John 10:33** they said to Jesus:

It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God.”

John 10:33b

In other words, they got the message. They knew who Jesus was claiming to be. He wasn’t claiming to be a good teacher or a prophet, but nothing less than God in the flesh.

So, they plan to kill Him the first chance they get. And with that, Jesus leaves town—He leaves Judea—with His disciples.

But then they get a message that Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus, is dying.

And Jesus announces to His disciples that they are going back to Judea. And they don’t want to go back to Judea; that is not a friendly place.

And then Thomas says this:

So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

John 11:16

Get this now: Thomas assumes Jesus is a dead man walking. He’s not an optimist who says, “Oh, Jesus will be fine; it’ll work out.”

No, no! In his mind, Jesus is going to die. “Let’s go that we might die with Him,” that’s how he thinks this will turn out.

But he doesn’t say here, “Jesus, if You go back there, You’re going to die, so it’s been really nice knowing You. I’ve learned so much over the past two years.”

No! Thomas makes this incredible statement of courage: “Jesus is going to die, so let’s follow Him to the very end.”

But this is also a statement of incredibly loyal love. Thomas is effectively saying, “I don’t want to be alive without Him. I’d just as soon die if Jesus is going to die. I don’t want to live without Him.”

You will not find a more loving, courageous, loyal statement from any other disciple than this statement from **Daring Thomas**.

Yes, Thomas will disappoint the Lord; he will collapse in grief and despair and give up.

But, let me put this in principle form— here's a final timeless truth to learn from the life of Thomas:

The Lord does not choose disciples who will never disappoint Him, He shows His disciples that He will never disappoint them.

If the Lord removed all the disciples from among us today who didn't regularly disappoint Him and regularly fail Him, none of us would be His disciples today!

Thomas will make it all the way to India, where he will serve most of his life before being martyred for his faith. He is believed to have been buried in southern India, I have visited that site there in Chennai, India.



Which of these disciples most resonate with you right now? Which one do you relate to the most? What can you learn from their story?

To this day, many churches in southern India trace their roots back to the ministry of Thomas.

MacArthur, p. 164

The Lord doesn't choose disciples who will never fail Him, He chooses disciples and shows us all that He will never fail us.

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