

The Master's Men (Pt. 3)

Luke 6:15b-16

Manuscript and Discussion Guide for May 30, 2021

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Summary: As Stephen concludes his study of the disciples of Jesus, he reminds us that we don't need status, money, or special skills to be an effective follower of Christ. All we truly need is an attentive heart to God, and a desire to follow His lead. Join Stephen and be encouraged in your Christian service today.

Today, we arrive at the conclusion of Luke's Gospel's list of the 12 disciples. We've paused long enough to take an overview of these men we've referred to as "The Master's Men."

We've observed that they appear in three groups of four disciples. The first group is the most well-known. They speak the most and are spoken to most often by the Lord. The second group plays a significant role at times, but we know less about them.

Today, we explore what we can in the lives of the last group. We know the least about them all except for the very last disciple in the list—the one always mentioned last—Judas Iscariot.

We're learning in the process of this overview principles of application which I trust have become encouraging to you,

as disciples of Jesus, by faith in His gospel and in His person.

There are too many principles to rehearse from our first two studies, but I'll repeat a couple of them to sort of prime the pump.

We've learned that Jesus chose His disciples not because of who they were, but because of who they would *become*.

Along the same lines, we learned that: Jesus didn't choose disciples because of their spiritual heritage; He chooses them to begin a spiritual heritage.

And that is going to be seen clearly in what little information we've been given of this 3rd and final grouping of four disciples.

These are 12 ordinary men, as G. Campbell Morgan called them in his

classic work on the disciples, written in 1937.

William Barclay also wrote 50 years ago, “These twelve ordinary men were not trained theologians; they were not wealthy; they had no special position in society.

William Barclay, The Gospel of Mark (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 74

They were unlettered, unimpressive men who walked close enough to the Lord to wear His dust.

What makes you a good disciple to this day isn’t the fact that you are impressive, but that you are impressionable.

Oswald Chambers wrote that all throughout history, God has chosen and used nobodies, who depended entirely upon Him—who began displaying His power and grace.

Adapted from R. Kent Hughes, Luke: Volume 1 (Crossway, 1998), p. 209

The disciples were run of the mill men, ordinary people.

But that’s encouraging, isn’t it! Abraham Lincoln once wrote, “God must like ordinary people, because he made so many of them.”

ibid

But ordinary was okay with the twelve, because they never considered themselves the hero anyway; Jesus Christ was their hero.

Adapted from A.B. Bruce, The Training of the Twelve (original printing, 1877; reprint, Zondervan, 1983), p. 39

And they eventually gave everything away to wear the dust of their Master Teacher.

Now with that, let’s go back to Dr. Luke’s list of the 12 in Luke chapter 6. In the latter part of verse 15, we’re given the names of this final grouping of four men.

The first is **James the son of Alphaeus (Luke 6:15b).**

Now you’ll find in the New Testament, among the followers of Jesus, more than one man by the name of James.

We’ve already encountered James, the son of Zebedee who earned, along with his brother John, the nickname: sons of thunder.

Another James appears in the New Testament—even more prominently—and that’s the half-brother of Jesus, born to Mary and Joseph sometime after the virgin birth of Jesus.

Matthew’s Gospel records an event where the Jewish leaders are disputing the claims of Christ by saying:

Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us?

Matthew 13:55-56a

In other words, how can Christ be the Son of God when He has brothers and sisters?

We know from Scripture that James will not believe in who Jesus really is until after the resurrection.

But he does believe and becomes a prominent leader in the church. The apostle Paul wrote in **Galatians 1:18** that:

Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

Galatians 1:18-19

James eventually becomes the leading elder—the pastoral spokesman—of the church in Jerusalem.

Adapted from John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (W Publishing 2002), p. 171

But Pastor James isn't the James listed here among the original twelve.

This **James is the son of Alphaeus**, not Joseph.

The truth is: the only thing we really know about this James is the name of his father, Alphaeus.

James never surfaces in any of the biblical accounts in the ministry of Jesus.

There is only one more clue about him that appears in Mark's Gospel, where he is referred to James, the less.

Mikros, translated "little" or "shorter" primarily refers to physical stature.

Ibid.

But it could also refer to age, to be understood as James the younger. In other words, he was younger than the

other James in this list of 12, the son of Zebedee.

Frankly, we don't really know for sure.

It's more than likely that as these events unfolded, to distinguish the apostle James from James the half-brother of Jesus and James the son of thunder, they tagged him with "Little James".

He was either small in stature or younger in age, but we do know that he was less influential than any of these other men named James.

So, here's a man who was called by Christ—just as much as Peter and John. Peter and John will go on to make a mark in church history, becoming some of the best-selling authors of inspired Scripture.

We know nothing of Little James.



Do you find encouragement in the obscure and unknown disciples? How can you be encouraged in your service to Christ, regardless of your fame or status?

He never wrote a book of the Bible; he never preached a sermon quoted in Scripture; he never had a conversation with Jesus that was recorded for us in the New Testament; he never held an office in the church in Jerusalem. He was simply called—and he followed—as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

That leads me to craft this principle of application:

Jesus doesn't choose disciples to have the same impact, or the same ministry; He chooses disciples to deliver the same message.

Church tradition states that he was stoned to death in Jerusalem after two decades of faithful witness for Christ.

Now let's move on to next man in the list; he's another disciple that needs to be distinguished because he has the same name as another disciple in this list.

Luke mentions the next of the 12 here in **chapter 6 at the end of verse 15, Simon the Zealot.**

Not Simon Peter, the famous disciple, but Simon the Zealot. And again, we're not given one conversation or insight from this man or about this man.

He is as obscure as Simon Peter is famous.

Bruce, p. 34

Simon the Zealot is never mentioned outside of the list of original disciples.

But Luke adds this tagline to Simon's name that speaks volumes. It connects Simon to a group of nationalistic Jews who had one desire: to overthrow Rome.

And they were willing to shed blood if necessary. We know from history that the Zealots were organized about 20 years before Jesus began His ministry.

It all started with Roman taxation. The Jewish people were frankly tired of it; they hated Rome and they certainly hated paying Rome out of their hard-earned income.

So, a man by the name of Judas the Galilean became a rogue leader and began a revolt against Rome.

He easily convinced many people that paying taxes to Rome was nothing less than an act of treason against God.

Adapted from MacArthur, p. 176

The people cheered him on, and he led his band of men on a rampage, murdering, plundering, and destroying all things Roman.

A few years later, Rome caught up with him and his followers. Rome crucified his sons and then put him to death as well.

Ibid

You could write into the margin of your Bibles next to Simon the Zealot's name, "Simon the Outlaw" or "Simon the Gangster."

This man's history was troubling. He was a red-hot nationalist; his willingness to associate with the Zealots meant that he was a powder keg, waiting to be ignited.

His resume would have waved all kinds of red flags.

One author wrote, "He wasn't a safe man to make an apostle of . . . he could easily have made the Roman government suspicious of Jesus and His followers.

Adapted from A.B. Bruce, p.35

But all that aside—forget all the trouble with the Roman government for a moment—what will this be like among the 12 disciples?

How do you put Simon the Zealot and Matthew the Turncoat in the same Bible study group?

You have a red-hot patriotic Jew now camping out and serving side-by-side with a Jewish traitor; you have a tax hater next to a former tax gatherer; these men came to Jesus with their prejudices, their passions, their preferences. They had as much to unlearn as they had to learn.

Ibid

One of the most overlooked miracles in the ministry of Jesus was the fact that He could get these 12 men to get along.



Do you know believers who you disagree with on many things? How does your unity in Christ overcome those differences? If it doesn't overcome those differences, is there something in your heart you need to change?

And He does it to this day.

In fact, one author wrote that this union of opposites was not a problem, it was a prophecy—these 12 very different men would paint a picture of the future church in miniature.

Ibid

They got along not because they naturally loved each other, but because they loved their Master, who in turn taught them to love one another.

Let me put it this way:

The differences between the disciples were not distractions, but declarations of unity in the body of Christ.

Church history informs us that Simon the Zealot will go on to pioneer the ministry of the gospel, taking it north into the rugged island landscape of what we know today as Great Britain. He will eventually be martyred, crucified, and buried in an unmarked grave somewhere on the British Isles.

The next disciple is again going to be quickly distinguished from another disciple with the same name.

Luke mentions him in the beginning of **verse 16 as Judas, the son of James.**

As if to say, “not the other Judas.” I mean who wants to be mistaken for that one?!

Judas is a wonderful name, which means, “Jehovah leads.” But after the betrayal by Judas Iscariot, this Judas, evidently preferred to go by one of his two nicknames.

Judas, the son of James is referred to as the three-named apostle: Judas, Lebbaeus, and Thaddaeus.

Matthew and Mark's Gospels refer to him as Thaddaeus – which means beloved.

Some manuscripts use the name Lebbaeus in Matthew 10:5; it comes from the Hebrew root that refers to the heart—literally “heart child.”

MacArthur, p. 178

It’s apparent that this obscure disciple was nicknamed and known for his sweet and gracious spirit; a man known for heartfelt devotion and ministry.

And beyond that, we know very little about him.

Fortunately, there is one conversation that takes place where Judas speaks.

John’s Gospel account records that moment where the Lord is telling His disciples that He will not manifest Himself to the world at this time, but only to them.

And tender-hearted Judas speaks up and asks the Lord a question.

John writes:

Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

John 14:22-23

In other words, his heart seems to be broken over the fact that the rest of the

world isn’t going to have the benefit of seeing the Lord as he and the other disciples have had. This question reveals tender-hearted humility.

He can’t believe that Jesus would reveal Himself to this rag-tag group and not to the whole world.

Adapted from MacArthur, p. 179

With that, and without any mention of his ministry impact or influence, Judas Thaddaeus Lebbaeus disappears from Scripture.

We have no record of his accomplishments; no definitive record of churches he planted or ministries he launched for the gospel.



How can you remain faithful, even when you aren’t receiving validation that what you are doing is effective? Are you internally motivated enough to carry on in service, even if you never receive encouragement or validation from others?

All we have is some early church tradition that this tender-hearted disciple traveled into the region of modern-day Turkey where he faithfully served Christ until a mob of people clubbed him to death for his faith.

What we do know—John records for us—is that this disciple’s name has already been carved into the gemstone

foundation of the Father's House
(Revelation 21:14).

That leads me to another principle as it relates to obscure disciples like Judas Thaddaeus Lebbeaus; here it is:

Your service for Christ doesn't have to be recognized on earth to be rewarded in Heaven.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews—who, ironically hasn't been identified conclusively either—writes:

For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name . . .

Hebrews 6:10

The verb here for **overlook**—**God is not unjust to overlook**—means to overlook, to pass away, to ignore.

In other words, no matter how great or small your service, no matter how applauded or ignored, highlighted, or passed over on earth, the Master sees everything. He misses nothing; the smallest act is recorded in Heaven.

Now finally, the last disciple to make an appearance in this list, Luke writes here at the end of **verse 16, Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.**

Some believe that Iscariot is a derivative of the Latin sicarius, which means dagger man, or assassin.

The curved sica, the dagger, was concealed in their robes; this was the practice of some of the Zealots who were known to assassinate Romans and disloyal Jews.

While it's an intriguing description for Judas, more than likely Iscariot is a reference to Kerioth, a region in northern Judea from which he came.

Judas' father is identified in **John 6:71**, John writes concerning, "**Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot.**"

Now more than likely when you think of Judas, you think of a beady eyed, sneaky guy who lurked on the fringes of the group just sort of watching everybody.

You picture Judas as the creepy disciple.

Or as one little boy referred to him in Sunday school, "Judas the Scariest."

But the record of Scripture doesn't bear that out. In fact, he's so trusted that he's put in charge of the disciple's bank account (John 12).

He was trustworthy. He seemed to be a man of integrity. He volunteered to serve. He's your candidate to teach Sunday school, to serve on the committees. He wasn't the kind of person who slipped into church and sat on the back row—no offense back there.

Judas wasn't aloof, he was involved. He wasn't scary or strange; he was right in the thick of ministry.

In fact, in the upper room, when Jesus announced that one of them was going to

betray him, nobody looked at Judas and said, “I knew it was Judas all along; it was those beady little eyes.” No, they all said, “Lord, is it me?”

And by the way, Judas wasn’t seated in the corner; he was sitting next to Jesus, dipping their food in the same bowl.

A principle of application is this:

It’s possible to identify with Jesus and not believe in Him.

Somewhere along the way, Judas realized that Jesus wasn’t going to come through with an overthrow of Rome and the supremacy of Israel. Somewhere along the way, Jesus became a disappointment.



Do you know anyone who professes to believe in Jesus, but for the wrong reasons? What are some other reasons, besides genuine saving faith, why people might claim to follow Jesus?

Judas has heard the greatest preacher preach, the greatest teacher teach, he has watched God the Son perform miracle after miracle—from walking on water to raising the dead to commanding the demonic world.

How do you miss it?

Here’s the answer in principle form:

It’s possible to be exposed to the light, and still want the darkness.

And Judas will betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver; the price of a first century disabled slave.

With that the list ends in Luke’s Gospel.

The disciple Matthias will be added later to take the place of Judas as the early church selects someone who followed Jesus and saw the resurrected Jesus in person (Acts 1:21-22).

And once again, we’re back to someone so ordinary being added to the original 12 that we know absolutely nothing of the ministry of Matthias.

I read of an event that occurred many years ago where an accomplished violinist decided to experiment with his audience. It was advertised that he would be in concert, playing on a rare and expensive Stradivarius violin, which at the time was valued at \$200,000 dollars. Now, of course, they are worth millions.

The concert hall was packed. The violinist took his place and played. It was beautiful; it was magnificent!

Halfway through his itinerary, he finished a piece of music, and suddenly—to the shock of his audience—he snapped the neck of the violin in half, dropped it to the floor and walked off stage.

Of course, the audience was horrified! A moment later, the conductor addressed

the crowd and said, “The Maestro was not playing on an expensive and rare violin; it was a violin he bought at a pawn shop for \$20 dollars. He will now return and finish his concert on that rare and expensive Stradivarius.”

And when he returned and played, very few people could even begin to tell the difference.

It reminded me of the fact that you and I are \$20 dollar violins. Ordinary violins!

But the Master—the Maestro—has bought us from the pawn shop of a broken-down world, and in His hands, as we yield ourselves to Him, the artistry and the beauty of His message is heard.

So that to Him *alone* belongs the praise and the glory.

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