**THEY LEFT EVERYTHING AND FOLLOWED HIM**

Jesus knows that in less than 2 years He is going to be crucified (He predicts this many times in the gospels). He knows that after His death He’ll be raised from the dead. He knows that 40 days after His resurrection that He will return to His Father. He therefore knows that His earthly work will need to be handed off to someone else. So it is that He selects The Twelve to be his representatives and He pours Himself into them, training them for ministry. Everything from Acts thru the Epistles tells us how the church spread the good news about Jesus Christ to people everywhere. It tells how the church (called “the body of Christ”) carries out the great commission of Matthew 28. And it all started with Jesus’ disciples in Jerusalem.

So let’s read the account of Jesus call of these 12 men…

READ Luke 5:1-3

If you look at a parallel of the gospels (comparison of the four gospel accounts chronologically) you will see that Jesus had crossed paths with Simon before. He’s not just some random fisherman out fishing on the lake. READ John 1:35-42

Two of John the Baptist’s disciples hear John the Baptist testify that Jesus is “the Lamb of God.” At that point they believe that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah and they begin to follow Him. One is named in this text as Andrew and the other most Bible scholars believe to be the apostle John (the one who wrote the gospel of John).

Andrew gets so excited about finding Jesus that he goes and tells his brother Simon and then brings him to Jesus. Jesus looks at Peter and says, “I know you. You're Simon the son of John. You’re a nobody, just a fisherman from Galilee. But I declare to you that you are Simon but you are going to become Cephas, Peter, a rock.” Right off the bat Jesus knows Simon’s character and He knows what kind of a man he is and what he will become over time. He will become “a rock,” a bold leader of the early church who will one day preach a sermon in Jerusalem and 3,000 people will be saved. So, when Jesus crosses paths with Simon again in Luke 5, Jesus know who Simon is. And Simon knows Jesus.

READ Luke 5:4-11

Simon demonstrates that he has faith in Jesus (he calls Jesus “Master”). Simon does what Jesus tells him to do even though, logically, it doesn’t make much sense. The result of Simon’s obedience is that he and his fishing partners catch so many fish in their nets that it almost sinks two of their boats! Simon knows this is a God thing. He recognizes the deity of Jesus. In fear he falls down before Jesus and declares “I am a sinful man, O Lord.” This is the reaction of most people when they are in the presence of a holy God. Jesus says to Peter, “Do not be afraid. From now on you’ll be catching, not fish, but men.”

This passage also mentions two other fishermen who were there on the Sea of Galilee that same day, James and John the sons of Zebedee. Matthew’s account tells us that a little further down the shore Jesus sees these two brothers, James and John in their boat with their father mending their fishing nets. Jesus calls out to them to follow Him. They immediately left the boat and their father and followed Him. Again Jesus had crossed paths with these two men before as we saw in the John 1 passage.

So far we have accounted for four men – all four are fishermen from Galilee – Andrew and his brother Simon Peter and James and his brother John. All four recognize Jesus as the Messiah. All four leave everything and follow Jesus. Notice that Jesus does not choose men with any theological training, no rabbis, no scribes, no Pharisees, no Sadducees, no priests, no religious types at all. Nor will He when He chooses the other eight men, as we will see. Rather, Jesus chooses common ordinary men who have faith in Him, believe what He says, and who are willing to leave everything and follow Him.

There are two other men besides these four who have expressed belief in Jesus and followed Him. They are also mentioned back in John ch 1.

READ John 1:43-51

So now we can add Philip and Nathanael (aka Bartholomew) to our list of Jesus’ disciples. There’s good biblical evidence to suggest that they are also fishermen. After Jesus’ resurrection the disciples returned to Galilee and Peter says, “I am going fishing” (John 21:3) and the others who were with Peter reply, “we’re going with you also.” Philip and Nathanael were part of this group. And like Andrew, Simon Peter, James and John, they too express their faith in Jesus and recognize Him as the Messiah, the Son of God.

Well, let’s go back to Luke Ch 5 and read about another disciple whom Jesus called. READ Luke 5:27-32.

Levi the tax collector is better known as Matthew. He is the first non-Galilean fisherman that Jesus calls to be His disciple. But just like the others he is willing to leave it all behind, his entire livelihood, and follow Jesus. Well if you think fisherman had a bad reputation, tax collectors were the worst of the worst in the minds of the Jewish people. After all they worked for the enemy, the Roman government! But Jesus doesn’t see them in a negative light. He sees them like He sees all of us – as sinners in need of a Savior. And why did Jesus come? Go back to last week’s lesson: To save sinners, the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. If one recognizes their lost wretched condition, Jesus is there to save you. Yes, whether you are a fisherman, a tax collector, or even a Pharisee.

READ Luke 6:12-16 [note the first 7 we have already talked about]

The last five mentioned here that Jesus called we know very little about. We know nothing of their calling other than that they were called and they followed Jesus. These are Thomas (also a fisherman from Galilee), James the son of Alphaeus (James the less), Simon the Zealot, Judas the son of James (Thaddeus) and Judas Iscariot. So that completes the list of the Twelve.

These 12 disciples are the men that Jesus focuses His ministry teaching on for the next 18 months. He trains them and equips them to carry on His ministry after He is gone. Jesus prepares them in various phases. Phase 1 is their initial conversion when they come to believe in Jesus as the Messiah from God. Phase 2 is their call to ministry, to follow Him, which we just talked about. Phase 3 involves a sort of internship where Jesus sends them out in groups of two. They go out and evangelize for a while and then they return to Jesus for an extended time of teaching. He will occasionally send them back out. Luke 9 and Mark 6 talk about this. Phase 4 occurs after Jesus has been resurrected during the 40 days before He goes back to heaven. Only 11 of the 12 make it to this phase, Judas of course commits suicide after betraying Jesus. This is when Jesus gives them the Great Commission. The Book of Acts records how they were obedient, how they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit. It tells how they witnessed with boldness in face of persecution and spread the gospel message in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, Samaria and then throughout the Roman Empire and beyond.

Ten of the remaining eleven disciples, later known as the Apostles, died martyrs deaths. Only John died of old age but he was persecuted and for a time banished by the Roman government to the Island of Patmos where he wrote Revelation. If you would like to read a good book about the disciples I recommend Twelve Ordinary Men by John MacArthur.

One last thing I want to say about these 12 men that Jesus called. They were far from perfect. They were flawed individuals. Just read the gospels. Jesus knew this about them. He tried to help them out through intensive training. First, they lacked spiritual understanding. Jesus is constantly asking them, “Do you not yet understand?” “O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe!” He says. Second, they lacked humility. As you read the gospels you see how often they were self-absorbed and self-centered. They often argued among themselves over petty issues. Third, they lacked faith. “O you of little faith,” Jesus says. He even asked them one time, “How is it that you have no faith?” Fourth, they lacked commitment. They all ran away when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus. Even their leader, Simon Peter denied Jesus three times out of fear. Their lack of commitment was why Jesus prayed His high priestly prayer in John 17, so that they would remain faithful and that the Father would bring them to heaven. Finally, they lacked power; which is why Jesus sent them the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

All this begs the obvious question and here is where we find application for ourselves (because at one time or another we all exhibit some of these traits). Why would Jesus call men with no understanding, no humility, no faith, no commitment and no power? The answer is found in 2 Corinthians 12:9 and with this we’ll close because it is a word for us: “My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness.” Nothing that these men did or that we as His disciples will ever do for the Kingdom comes from our own innate ability, but from God alone. If we are going to bear fruit it will be thru His wisdom, His strength and His power and not our own. “Therefore,” Paul says, “I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”