

I. Introduction:

A. A couple weeks back I was at a conference where one of the speakers was a young man named Finny Kurkuvilla. I'd guess him to be 35. Finny received his undergraduate degree at Cal Tech. He then entered a joint MD / PhD program at Harvard and, because of his interest in systems theory, also picked up a Masters Degree in computers from MIT. A few years ago Finny started a healthcare investment firm, which now has two funds that Morningstar rates in the top five percent. I ran into him in the hall after his presentation. He's very winsome. And as we talked I learned that his true passion was the church he planted and pastors in Boston, which is growing quickly, and that in addition to his numerous scientific publications he has written two books on faith. And, oh by the way, Finny and his wife have five children.

B. I wish I'd met Finny a year ago, before the series on the Seven Deadly Sins. I suspect I could have used Finny when I was working on the sermon on envy. I'm referencing him today in a different way. Let me say this, if I were Jesus and was selecting a team to help me change the world – was identifying the core group to help me introduce the Kingdom of God (to launch the revolution) – I would choose Finny and those like him.

C. If I was Jesus and was going to make sure that what I was starting was going to keep going after I left, spread around the world – eventually become the biggest, most global, most ethnically diverse institution ever and a force for good that has not been matched – I'd have gone to people like Bill Gates and Warren Buffet and said, "Hey guys, why don't the three of us get serious, combine our money and do something significant."

D. If I was in charge of the revolution I'd chose people like Marissa Mayer, who, after helping launch Google, took over Yahoo and, in the course of the first few months as CEO, stopped its slide, increased its stock value, made a major acquisition and gave birth to her first child.

E. If I was Jesus I would have chosen different people than Peter, James and John.

F. Today we watch as Christ selects 12 men to become his "A" Team, his core. They symbolically replace the 12 tribes of Israel as the building blocks of God's work going forward. They were remarkably unremarkable – and that is being generous. They were among those the other rabbis had left behind. Disciples signed on with a rabbi when they were about 12 or 13. They guys had all been passed over. Jesus was late to the draft. He ends up staffing his revolution with people no one else wanted. And in yet another display of his amazing abilities, it worked. The former management consultant in me is

baffled by Christ's ability to transform 12 no-names (12 also-rans) into a movement that changes the world.¹

G. Today, as we begin our new series, we start with their selection. Next week we begin focusing on their orientation.

II. Let me read the text for you. It's begins in Luke 6:12.

A. By way of context, Jesus is probably a year into the three years he spends as an itinerant preacher. He's been traveling around Galilee teaching and healing and amazing everyone with what he says and does. He has claimed: to be the Messiah, to have plans to change the world, to have the ability to forgive sins and to be Lord of the Sabbath. He has backed up those claims by demonstrating power over evil, sickness and nature. The crowds that surround him are large. I'm reading now from Luke 6:12:

A.1. One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: ¹⁴Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

III. I have four observations

A. Number One: The first thing Jesus did was pray.

A.1. First things first, when faced with a big decision Jesus got away from the crowds to spend time with his Father. Luke has noted this several times already. We read that Jesus slipped away to pray. Jesus got up early to spend time with his Father. This is a bit different than his morning devotions. This was an extended, all-night prayer session. We'll see something like it before other big events and important decisions.

A.2. We're not told exactly what He prays but we can guess. "Father, this is important. I don't want to mess it up. Much depends on who I chose. I need you to guide me." And then he works through the options one by one. "I like Peter but he's a handful, so impetuous. And Judas, hmm, I got a bad feeling about him but I need a book-keeper, and I suspect he may play another role."

¹ First hires are critical. When you have 1,000 employees the next one you add is not that important. When you have one and you add 12 those 12 really matter.

A.3. As an aside, it says that he spent the night praying. Some of you have a hard time spending ten minutes in prayer. There are some simple ways to structure things.

A.3.a) The Lord's Prayer is a great template. Rather than rush through it, you can spend a minute or two – or an hour or two – expanding upon, meditating on each of the six petitions: *Hallowed be thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done; Give us this day our daily bread; Forgive our debts as we forgive our debtors; Lead us not into temptation.* Prayerfully, meditatively sit with these, turn them over in your mind. Allow God to speak.

A.3.b) ACTS is another template. The A is for Adoration; the C is for Confession, the T is for Thanksgiving; and the S is for Supplication (petition).

A.3.c) A third option is to turn various passages of Scripture into prayers. The Psalms are ready to be prayed.

A.3.d) Or write your prayers out like you would a letter to God.

A.3.e) Make a list of all the things that are making you anxious and talk through the list with Him.

A.4. I have posted a new blog entry that offers some specific suggestions on how to spend time in prayer, starting with how to spend 10 minutes in prayer. For now let me simply note that Jesus prayed before he acted. He did act. He didn't just pray. He prayed with humility and then acted with boldness. But he started with prayer.

B. Second Observation: He called some to be apostles.

B.1. Verse 13 reads: When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles.

B.2. He already had disciples – the word means “students,” or “learners.” There was always a crowd following Him, listening to what he was teaching, asking to be healed. From among that group He selected 12 to be apostles. These would be those He would spend the most time with him and eventually commission to carry things forward. The word *apostle* means “one who is sent out on a mission.”² In the ancient world the term was used to refer to ambassadors or emissaries, those who had the authority to speak and sometimes act on behalf of a king.

B.3. We see it used in two ways in the New Testament.

B.3.a) First, Jesus is the chief apostle. In Hebrews 3:1 we read, “Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest.” He was sent by God the Father as His representative. He was (is) the primary ambassador from heaven.

B.3.b) The second way – the main way – is as a reference to the 12, who were: selected by Christ; who saw Jesus after He had risen from the dead; and who were entrusted to carry the movement forward. They were the ones commissioned to take the church everywhere. These “capital A” apostles are those selected by Jesus to be the foundation of the church.³ They have a unique authority that is not matched by anyone else.

B.4. The term *apostle* is occasionally used today.

B.4.a) You will hear people talk about having an apostolic ministry, which refers to going into an area where the Gospel has not spread, and sharing it with others – starting something, doing cross-cultural ministry or church-planting. I’ve never heard anyone doing this refer to themselves as an apostles.

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Apostle – from *apostolos* – is a combination of apo, meaning “out of” and stello meaning “send.” An apostle is someone sent out on a mission.

3 See Eph. 2:20

B.4.b) But some do use the term. Instead of calling themselves a pastor or a bishop,⁴ they say they are an Apostle.⁵ Some go so far as to imply that their authority rivals that of the 12. My advice is that if you meet someone like that, you back slowly out of the room.

B.5. So the term *apostle* has a few meanings. Basically, it refers to the 12 and it indicates that these are the men Jesus is going to invest most of his time into and then entrust with the movement he is launching.

C. Third: The call was to suffer and die.

C.1. It's not unfair to say that the invitation Jesus extends to these men was to move from the "come and see" stage to the "go and die" stage.

C.2. Following Jesus is not a path to power and privilege but to service and sacrifice. And, as we will see next week, the decision to follow Jesus does not make any sense unless we are going to live forever.

C.2.a) We will see this next week when Christ sits the 12 down for orientation. Christianity 101. *Right Side Up* is mostly about the big ideas – the radical, disorienting, upside-down first principles that Jesus shares with the apostles right after he calls them: *Blessed are the poor, meek and hungry; Love your enemies; Go to the end of the line. Blessed are you when men insult you.*

C.2.b) It's all quite disorienting. Most of the time, the first days of class are easy. You review what you learned last year or you're introduced to the subject with some simple concepts. You learn your ABCs before you are handed *The Brother's Karamazov*. You learn that $2 + 2 = 4$ before turning to digression analysis. That is not what happens with the apostles. Jesus takes a different tack. He can't build on what is in place. He has to turn everything Right Side Up in order to start.

4

A bishop is someone who is overseeing several churches.

5 They point out that the office is listed in I Cor. 12-14 and Romans 12 and say, those are my gifts.

C.3. One of the ideas He needs in place is that leadership is about service not about privilege. Leaders do not go to the front of the line but to the back. They are not to use their power to step up but to step down. We get this wrong. We miss the very clear example of Christ who, “although he existed in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped.”⁶ He emptied himself. He climbed down the ladder. Leaders generally serve themselves first – it is enormously hard not to. But that is not what Jesus did and that is not what He calls them to – or us!

C.4. If you read through the Gospels enough times, when you get to their selection you realize that the invitation Jesus is extending is to suffer and die. Being selected to be an Apostle – getting in on the “ground floor of The Church” – is not like getting in on the ground floor of Google, where you stock options are going to yield hundreds of millions of dollars. Ten of the twelve apostles will be killed for the cause. And the two exceptions are Judas – who kills himself after denying Christ, and John, who suffers horribly and is banished to Patmos (a sort of a first century Alcatraz) but dies of old age. The other ten are killed for their faith. If you want you can read about what happened to them, look in *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*:

C.4.a) James, Christ’s brother, is the first to be killed. He was bishop in Jerusalem when he was arrested, condemned and beheaded.

C.4.b) Simon, who replaced him in Jerusalem, was later crucified.

C.4.c) Thomas was martyred in India. I visited a cave where he supposedly briefly retreated when things started to heat up.

C.4.d) Bartholomew, who is also said to have gone to India, was beaten, crucified, and beheaded, as was Andrew.⁷

C.4.e) Matthew, the former tax collector, was preaching somewhere in Northern Africa when he was killed with a spear.

C.4.f) Philip was stoned.

C.4.g) Peter was killed under Nero’s persecution in the early 60s.⁸ Tradition holds that he was crucified upside down because he didn’t feel worthy to die like Christ.

6 Phil. 2:5-11

C.5. Again, John is the only one to die of old age. And he was boiled in oil and sent to a prison island.⁹ The call Jesus was extending was from “come and see” to “go and die.”

D. Fourth Observation: Jesus went deep not wide

D.1. As I noted earlier, from what we can piece together it appears as though Jesus spent a year as an itinerant preacher before he chose the twelve. During that time the crowds grew large. But large crowds was not the strategy. The plan wasn't to get the attention of a lot of people. He didn't want Twitter followers; Jesus wanted disciples. So he chose twelve to be with him, and he invested in them so that they would in turn invest in others and spread the mission around the world.

⁷ Bernard and St. Cyprian write about this: When Andrew, through his diligent preaching had brought many to the faith of Christ, Egeas the governor asked permission to the Roman senate to force all Christians to sacrifice to and honor the Roman idols. Andrew thought he should resist Egeas and went to him, telling them that a judge of men should first know and worship as judge in heaven. “While worshiping the true God,” Andrew said, “he should banish all false gods and blind idols from his mind.” Furious at Andrew, Egeas demanded to know if he was the man who had recently overthrown the temples of the gods and persuaded men to become Christians, a superstitious sect that had recently been declared illegal by the Romans. Andrew replied that, “The rulers of Rome didn't understand the truth. The son of God who came into the world for man's sake taught that the Roman gods were devils, enemies of mankind teaching men to offend God, and causing him to turn away from them. By serving the devil, men fall into all kinds of wickedness.” Andrew said, “And after they die, nothing but their evil deeds are remembered.” The proconsul ordered Andrew not to preach these things anymore or he would face a speedy crucifixion.” Whereupon Andrew replied, “I would not have preached the honor and glory of the cross if I feared the death of the cross. He was condemned to be crucified for teaching a new sect and taking away the religion of the Roman gods. Andrew, going toward the place of execution, and seeing the cross waiting for him, never changed his expression, neither did he fail in his speech. His body fainted not, nor did his reason fail him as often happens to men about to die. He said, ‘Oh cross, most welcome and longed for, with a willing mind, joyfully and desirously I come to you being the scholar of him which did hang on you because I have always been your lover and yearn to embrace you.’”

⁸ Eusebius writes, “a man might then see cities full of men's bodies, the old lying together with the young, and the dead bodies of women cast out naked without reverence of that sex in the open streets.”

⁹ John was banished to the island of Patmos during a wave of persecution under Domitian. We believe he was later released and allowed to go to Ephesus, where he remained until the reign of Trajan. In his later life he served churches in Asia and wrote his gospel.

D.2. Jesus went deep not wide. In fact, as we'll see as we work through Luke's Gospel, when the crowds got too big, Jesus talked more about the cost of following him and the numbers dwindled. He didn't sweet talk those who were hanging out just to see a miracle, just to get a free meal. And, He didn't simply focus on the twelve, he drilled down more specifically on three: Peter, James and John.

D.3. Men and women, Jesus could have filled stadiums with people, He could have kept healing and multiplying food and used his creative powers to attract hundreds of thousands of people. He doesn't do that. He quietly invests in a few with the goal that those few will invest in a few others who will in turn invest in a few others, and with this strategy, take the Kingdom of God to everyone.

D.4. If there is any doubt that this is the plan, Paul – who is the “last of the apostles.” He was not one of the twelve but he becomes one of the Apostles later on and ministers and writes with that authority.¹⁰ If there is any doubt about the master plan, Paul makes it as simple as he can when he writes to Timothy from a prison cell in Rome. Just before he dies Paul says:

***D.4.a)** Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.¹¹*

D.5. Jesus set up a down line. And guess what, it eventually reached you. The plan worked. You're here.

D.6. It didn't always look like the right move. For a couple years the disciples act like the Keystone Cops. They are late. They don't get it. When they are supposed to turn left they turn right; when the lesson is on humility they fight over who is the greatest; when Jesus needs them, they fall asleep. Two deny him.

D.7. But eventually they turn around and will set in motion a movement that eclipses all others. The church today is the largest organization on the planet. It's not growing here but it is growing around the world. Most churches in the West are in decline, but the number of people following Christ is growing every day and it's growing faster than any other worldview.

¹⁰ Read I Cor. 15.

¹¹ 2 Tim. 2:2

D.8. And – and! – it could happen here again if we went back to the plan, if we embraced the call and followed the plan. In fact, it could happen quickly. We could turn the world on its ear if we took it seriously. And we could do so quickly just with those of us in this room!

D.8.a) There will be about 2,000 people here this weekend – all in. Let's not count the kids or people who are visiting. To make it easy, let's say there are 1,000.

D.8.b) If everyone here reached one person this year and, over the course of the year, helped them learn enough to reach a person themselves, we would set in motion a plan that would spread around the planet in twenty years.

D.9. This is the way it supposed to work and this is the way it works when it works. We just got the Reveal results back. I've not had a chance to read through them let alone study them, but here is what we know, most everyone here is here because someone invited them.

D.10. The people who are new are new because someone invited them to come to church or someone shared the Gospel with them, offered to pray with them, did something that led the person who is new to faith to attend Alpha, join a small group, get into a Bible study and start attending church. It's always been that way. It will always be that way. People need to engage others. Invest in friendship with them and then invite them to take a next step.

D.11. If half of the people here did that this year, and helped that person grow to the point that they could extend a similar invitation, we'd be at 2,000 by next year, and 4,000 by the end of 2015, and 8,000 by the end of 2016 and 128,000 by the end of 2020. By 2030 we'd be a 131 million (and have real nasty parking problems) and by 2036 we'd be over eight billion.

D.12. If half the people in this room reached one person a year and invested in them to the extent that they could in turn invest in someone in the next year and keep that trajectory going, we'd reach the entire planet in just over 20 years.

D.13. Can you point to someone who is following Christ because of you? And, can you point to anyone that that person has led to faith? Men and women, this is a big part of what we take to heaven. The money, nice cars and house – that all stays back. As one person said, "Life is like a game of Monopoly and when you die it all goes back in the box." We cannot take that with us. What we do take are people and the investments we make in spreading the Kingdom of God.

D.14. Are you making investments in heaven? Are you storing up treasure in heaven, where it will last? That is the call. That is the invitation.

D.15. The battle plan is simple – be a disciple. Follow Christ. Move from “come and see” to a fully-invested follower of God. And spread the message. I promise you, if you start to move in this way, if you start investing in people – praying for them, taking an interest in them, inviting them to dinner, serving them – and then you extend some invitations – to church, to Alpha, to read something you think is interesting – you will see some of that take root. Not all. Some of the seeds fall on hard ground. Not all of it takes root and not all that takes root grows to maturity and starts spreading its own seeds. But if you will do that you will change and you will help change the world. This was Christ’s plan. It’s what He did and it has worked.

IV. There is more we might see in the text, for instance:

A. Jesus united a diverse group. The 12 were all Jewish men – that is the world where he lived – but it was actually quite diverse: John was young, whereas some of the others were older; there were both singles and married men; eleven were from the country, whereas one was from the city; Simon was a revolutionary – an anarchist (think “death to the machine!” a spiked-hair, punk rock anarchist.) Matthew was an IRS agent. A suit and tie CPA who worked for the Romans.¹² It’s much easier to all be the same. To think alike, vote alike, dress alike, root for the same team and listen to the same radio stations. Jesus united a diverse group of men.

B. It’s also worth noting that what Jesus did with the twelve was amazing. Building a lasting movement with a group of misfits doesn’t get quite as much ink as calming a storm, healing the sick or raising the dead, but it should. Jesus launched what has become the largest, most diverse, most global organization in the world – one that is still going. I do not have the current stats, but when I was consulting I’d point out that something like half the companies in the Fortune 500 were new in the last twenty years. Companies rise and fall. Jesus started something that has kept going – and he did so with remarkably unremarkable people. That is amazing.

V. There are other things we might focus on. I want to be sure you understand that the call is extended to us – to you.

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Most of the disciples were Bears fans, but it’s well known that Judas pulled for the Packers.

- A. The call Jesus extended to be fishers of men, to join the revolution, to come help change the world is extended to you and me.
- B. We are not invited to be apostles. Those jobs are already filled. But we are invited to take a next step.
- C. And much depends on it. And some of you need to step up. It's time. It's past time. You need to serve: you need to give; you need to invite. You need to pray humbly then proceed boldly. The good news is, you don't have to have the resume or talent of a Finny Kurkuvilla to be useful, because Jesus is Jesus. He is amazing. He can and will work through you. But you do have to step out.