

# The twelve disciples

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Preacher: Rev Duncan Macleod

[ 0 : 00 ] Verse 19 to 19, or at least the beginning of verse 19. And Simon he surnamed Peter, and James the son of Sebedee, and John the brother of James, and he surnamed them Buonertjes, which is the sons of Thunder, and Andrew and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Arthaus, and Thaddeus, and Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, which also betrayed him.

Now last week we saw the ministry to which the disciples were called. They were called to be with Jesus, they were called to preach, they were given power to heal those who were sick, and to cast out devils.

The fact that Jesus chose twelve reminds us that in the Old Testament, the children of Israel were made up of twelve tribes, and the New Testament church has been called the New Testament Israel.

And I believe that as we look at the twelve men who were chosen as the founding fathers of the New Testament church, that we see among them a vast variety of different types, and yet with one exception, and we'll have a few words to say about him later, they were all of the same mind. And I believe that this shows us that the Christian church in every age has been made up of different types of people.

[ 2 : 13 ] I don't believe that God wants Christians to be stereotyped, to be all in the same mold. He wants us as individuals to make up his church, and he wants us to work together as members of his body.

He wants us to make up his church. And he expects us to use whatever gift or gifts he may have given us for his own glory and for the good of the church and for the good of those who do not yet belong to Christ.

And so at the beginning of our sermon tonight, I return to the two questions that I posed at the end of last Sunday night's sermon.

One, do we belong to the true church of Jesus Christ? Have we been called by Christ to follow? And secondly, if we have, are we making use of the talents that he's given us in his service?

[ 3 : 36 ] Now tonight's sermon will be a kind of unusual sermon in the sense that I simply want to look with you at the 12 characters who are named for us by Mark in this passage.

Some of these characters are men that we are very familiar with. Some others we know next to nothing about.

Some were destined for greatness. Others were to remain in the background. And yet I believe they all have something to teach us.

And I think that it might be profitable for us to look at them together. We'll spend more time on some than we will on others. So that if we take 15 minutes looking at Simon Peter, don't panic.

That doesn't mean that we're going to take 15 minutes looking at the other 11. If we're to attempt that, we'll be here for the rest of this evening and maybe even into tomorrow morning.

[ 4 : 45 ] So don't panic. We'll just look at some in more detail than we will at others. The passage begins by bringing this man, Simon Peter, to our attention.

And Simon, he surnamed Peter. Now, the Bible tells us a lot about Simon Peter. And there are many Christians who would say that Simon Peter is their favourite disciple.

Simon Peter, in his early years, and possibly he never really lost this, was prone to sway from one position to another fairly quickly.

We find Simon Peter walking on water. And then we find Simon Peter sinking. And Jesus rebukes him for his lack of faith.

We find Simon Peter saying to Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. And Jesus turns and commends Simon for what he says.

[ 6 : 05 ] And yet, almost to the next breath, Simon Peter is saying to Jesus that he has no right to speak about dying on the cross.

And Jesus tells Simon Peter that Satan has got hold of him. And we find this man, again and again, swaying from one extreme to another.

He swears that he will never let his Lord down. He declares his loyalty to Christ. And before the end of the chapter, he's denying that he ever knew the Lord Jesus.

And yet, in our passage tonight, we read, And Simon is serving Peter. Now you ask, what's the significance of that statement?

Well, the significance of it is this. The word Peter means rock. In other words, somebody who will not be moved.

[ 7 : 18 ] Yet, as I've mentioned, Simon was prone to move from one position to another within seconds.

And yet, Jesus, when he calls him, gives him this name. Jesus overlooks the fact that Simon is so frail and fickle.

And Jesus says to him, you are yet going to become like that. The day will come when you will sway so easily.

The day will come when you will be fearless and thorough as a disciple and as an apostle. And when you read through the Acts of the Apostles, you find this same Simon whom Jesus, sir named Peter, this same Simon who denied that he knew Christ when our little lassie said that he was one of them.

We find him in the Acts, facing his foes declaring boldly that he prefers to obey God and not man.

[ 8 : 39 ] And this Simon Peter was transformed into a rock-like figure by the power of God. And yet, although Simon became like a rock, he had his faults for as long as he lived.

And later on in his life, the Apostle Paul had to correct Peter. He had to stand up and face him and rebuke him for being in the wrong.

And yet, by God's grace, Simon was to undergo a great change. And I would say tonight that what Jesus, by his grace, did for Simon, he can do for us.

It may be that we're not all that strong as far as standing up for Christ is concerned. It may be that we're at the stage just now where, like Simon, we prefer to hide our light under our cushion. maybe sometimes we even go so far as to deny that we know Jesus at all. And yet, the same grace that made Peter into a rock is able to make you and me firm and faithful in our standing forecast.

[ 10 : 12 ] We can't stand on our own. We can't face our friends, let alone our foes. For Jesus, in our own strength, that by the grace of God, we too can be named Peter.

We too can become rock-like. We too can become like Christ. Peter, as we saw a couple of weeks ago, asked that believers be made perfect, that they be established and strengthened by God.

Paul could say, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

he can make you and me men and women of courage and men and women of conviction. And he can make us strong soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And you might ask the question, before we move from silent Peter, why should silent be made like a rock? And why should we desire to be made like a rock?

[ 11 : 27 ] because Christ himself is described in the Bible as a rock. And if you want some homework tonight, then a good exercise would be to look up the number of times that Jesus Christ is described as a rock in the Bible.

In the Old Testament, as well as in the New, we find references to the rock of ages. Jesus Christ the Lord.

And so I would say, as I leave silent Peter for the moment, that we should want to be rock-like because to be rock-like is to be Christ-like. But then Jesus goes on and Jesus calls James, the son of Sebedee, and John, the brother of James.

And he gives them a name as well. he calls them Borneutus, which is the sons of thunder. Now you might ask, why are James and John mentioned to now?

And why is Andrew left till later on? Because you know that Peter and Andrew were brothers. And so you would expect the two of them to be named together. And I think that's a very good question to ask.

[ 12 : 52 ] And I think there's a very good answer to that question. And the answer to it, I believe, is this. The Bible emphasises that no matter how close we may be as members of families and in terms of human relationships, spiritual bonds and spiritual relationships must take precedence, relationships, even over the closest earthly relationship.

We know that Peter, James and John had a close affinity, the one with the other, as members of the inner circle of the disciples of Jesus.

And we know too that Andrew and Philip, who are named together in the next verse, were also very close in the work to which God called.

And so I think the answer to the question is that the Bible is emphasising the primacy of the spiritual relationship.

But we're told that these two were surnamed Boanaitis. And we're told what that surname means. It means the sons of thunder.

[ 14 : 23 ] What do we know about James and John from the Bible? Well, we know that James was the first of the apostles to be martyred.

And we know that John was in all probability the last of the apostles to die. James was killed by the sword of Herod according to Acts 12 verse 2.

John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was left to an old age in the service of the Lord.

And you say, John is the apostle of love. We've all come to know about John as the apostle of love. And yet our verse tonight tells us something else about John.

It tells us that John and James could be thought of in terms of thunder. And I think that the name that Jesus gave them was a name that suited them down to the ground.

[ 15 : 43 ] Because the scripture shows that these men, these brothers, were fiery by nature and were fervent in spirit.

They were intolerant of the man who cast out devils in Jesus' name because he refused to follow them.

And they were also the first to ask Jesus for permission, to pray to God for the fire to fall on the Samaritan village which refused to accept the gospel.

Jesus, James and John passing through this Samaritan village and their message is not received and James and John turn and say to Christ and they quote scripture as they speak to Christ they say can we not call for the fire to fall from heaven and consume them as Elijah did.

They use the example of Elijah to justify themselves for making this clean. How aimed their spirit was to the spirit that the child of God ought to have.

[ 17 : 17 ] How do for example their request was to the request of Abraham when God told him that he was going to burn up Sodom and Gomorrah?

God said to Abraham to him. How did him that Sodom was going to be destroyed? Did Abraham say, that's great Lord, send the fire and burn them up?

Not at all. Abraham prayed to God and Abraham said, if there are 50 righteous men in the city, will you destroy the city?

And God says, no. And then Abraham is encouraged to go on. If there are 45 there, will you destroy the city? And God says, I won't destroy it if I find 45 righteous men there.

What if there's only 40 Lord? Will you destroy the city for the sake of 40? For the sake of 40 I will not destroy the city. He goes on to say Abraham in his prayer, what if there's 30 men there, the size of our own congregation, after your own heart, will you destroy the city for the sake of 30?

[ 18 : 45 ] For the sake of 30 I will not destroy the city. What if there's only 20? Still I will not destroy it. What if there's only 10?

10 good men and true. 10 men after your own heart. Will you destroy the city for the sake of 10? If I find 10 white white men I will not destroy the city.

We know of course that the cities were destroyed because God failed to find 10 white men in that community.

But how difficult is the spirit of James and John as they call for the fire to fall and for the Samaritan village to be concerned.

The Bible also tells us that James and John were very impudent men. They dared ask God to give them a special place in heaven.

[ 19 : 53 ] They went to Jesus these two sons of thunder these two ambitious self centred characters and they said Lord we have a request or is it grant us that one of us will sit on your right

hand and the other on your left in the kingdom of heaven.

Did Jesus grant them the request? We know that he didn't. They were wrong in making their request. They were self self and they were ambitious.

They were fiery. They were fervent. They were sons of thunder and dead to save. But surely James was selfless as he went to the death of Christ.

Surely John comes over as an apostle of land. How can the two be squared up? They can be squared up like this. Grace transformed them.

Over a period of time as they walked the past and as they learned of the Lord they were transformed from being selfish to being selfless.

[ 21 : 21 ] From being loveless to being loving. Grace made them into what they were not by nature.

Yet we can also say this in their defense. They were very selfless men and it's good to be selfless.

And God was going to use the seed in the furtherance of his own kingdom in days to come.

But their seed had to be challenged by the grace of God in the right direction. I believe God is still looking for men and women who are fervent in spirit to serve.

I believe God wants to see seed in our hearts for his own sake. But I believe too that we must allow our seed to be channeled in the right direction by the grace of God.

And I am quite convinced that the sellousness of a quiet spirit may be more telling at the end of the day than the blood and thunder which we may hear from some but which leaves us asking where is the land?

[ 22 : 58 ] Can I refer to Ennestillen for a moment and ask the question who came across in the aftermath of Ennestillen as being the more Christian was it the preacher politician his behaviour on a television interview was embarrassing in the extreme or was it the father who in his heart found grace to pray for those who had taken his daughter away from her.

I'm not saying that the preacher politician isn't a Christian. James and John were Christians when they asked for the fire to fall in that city.

But Jesus turned to James and John and Jesus said to them ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.

And I am convinced that in the Ennestillen incident that the words of God and Wilson will have made more of an impact for good not only in his own country but perhaps even across the world than any thundering however eloquent it may be from a man who leaves us asking the question where oh where is the love yet having said that James and John were Christians but they needed a baptism of love and I believe they got it before Jesus was finished with them and so such men are called to his service but then we move on and in verse 18 Mark seems to lump eight of the apostles together and

Andrew and Philip and Bartholomew and Matthew and Thomas and James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus and Simon the Canaanite now it may be that some of these men were to be less in the limelight than the three characters that I've just mentioned in the earlier part of this sermon and yet I think that we need to comment just comment on each one of these men first of all there is Andrew the former fisherman who had brought Simon his brother to Christ Andrew could be described very early on as a true fisher of men he himself had responded almost immediately to the call of Christ Christ and he comes across in the gospel as one who is always ready to help others always ready to cater for those who are in need be it physical or spiritual men and men who are needed in the church of old men who are ready at once to respond to whatever

[ 26 : 39 ] God calls them to do men who are concerned about the physical and spiritual welfare of those around them men who will see anything anywhere anytime for you oh Lord do we have that kind of spirit in our own congregation do we have an Andrew here tonight ready to respond at once and ready to go and help others in their name anything anywhere anytime along with Andrew there is Philip who seems to have been of a similar kind of spirit he too was concerned about men's physical need as he was about their spiritual need but Philip comes across as somebody who may have been a little bit slow on the uptake in comparison with others remember

Jesus words to him in John 14 have you been so long with me and yet you have not known Philip and yet for all that Philip was always someone who was willing to learn in the school of Christ as I've said before there is no pupil who pleases a teacher more than the pupil who is prepared to learn the pupil who says I don't know it all but I want to be taught a teacher is delighted to teach that kind of pupil or student I believe it rejoiced the heart of Christ to hear Philip confess his ignorance

and I believe that Christ was thrilled as he got the opportunity to teach Philip the things of God is there someone here tonight who says

I'm not ready to follow Christ because I'm ignorant of a lot of what Christianity is all about I'm not prepared to serve Christ because I don't know as much as others know well Christ doesn't want the know all Christ wants the person who knows his limitations but is prepared to learn of him come to me and learn of me says Jesus the day any of us imagine that we know it all is probably the day when we know next to nothing of what the gospel and said in Christ is all about but then there's Bartholomew named here now people have asked the question who exactly was Bartholomew because his name hardly figures in the Bible and I think that we would be right in saying that Bartholomew can be identified as being the same person as

Nathaniel who is mentioned for us in other gospels Nathaniel was the one who asked can any good thing come out of Nazareth and it wasn't long until he came to know that the best man who ever lived came out of Nazareth Nathaniel Bartholomew and Bartholomew just means by the way son of Tolman Bartholomew son of Tolman Nathaniel son of Tolman he was the one of whom Christ said behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile what can we learn from Bartholomew we can learn this that in following Christ we're called upon to be honest and upright and straight we're not allowed to be dishonest we're not allowed to have guile we're not allowed to be pretenders we're called upon to be like himself of whom it has said there was no guile found in his mouth in our word he wants us to be honest as we follow him well how many of us tonight are honestly wanting to follow the

Lord he looks for that kind of spirit and he calls that kind of person into his own service then there is Matthew now I'm not going to say very much about Matthew because he's the same person as Levi whose call we looked at a number of weeks ago he was a Jewish tax collector hated by his own people he was a man who knew his scriptures he was a man who was humble he was a man who was prepared to forsake all and follow Christ he asked the question the night we considered his character I asked it again tonight do we have a Levi do we have a Matthew in our midst somebody who may be frowned upon by others who may be despised by society but they're not despised by Christ people may look down on you the

[ 32 : 12 ] Lord won't it doesn't matter what people think of you it's what the Lord thinks of you that matters and he takes the tax collectors of this world and he transforms them into his own disciples and then there is Thomas two things about Thomas Thomas comes across as a very devoted disciple on the one hand Thomas actually said on one occasion that he was prepared to die with his Lord devoted and yet on the other hand we find Thomas often prone to despondency doubting Thomas until the day comes when Thomas doubts disappear as the Lord is revealed to him and he acknowledges my Lord and my

God do we have someone here tonight who wants to be devoted to Christ but somebody who's prone to despondency and to sale somebody who tends to look on the dark side of things rather than on the bright and God can even call that kind of person to follow him devoted despondent but God will in his own time remove the despondency and help you to delight yourself all together in him now I don't believe that we can excuse doubts in the Christian faith in the Christian life some people make doubts a mark of grace I think they are disgrace and yet you must face the fact that many Christians are fed by doubts some of us have known what it is even as Christians to experience the most awful doubt as intellectual doubts even concerning the being of God flooded our minds I can stand here tonight in all honesty and I can tell you that there was a day in my Christian life when I was plagued by intellectual doubts regarding the very existence of God but by God's grace these doubts were eradicated and tonight like Thomas I can say without fear of a question arising in my mind about it my Lord and my God do we have a doctor here tonight go with your doubts to Christ and he can remove them from you and he can make you more devoted than Thomas ever was in his service and then we are told that there was James the son of Athens or

James the less as is described elsewhere James the younger now all I say about him is this the Bible tells us next to nothing about him apart from the fact that he was a follower of Jesus and used in the Lord says he was an insignificant character compared with some and yet in God's estimation he was also significant you think of yourself as an insignificant character a person that God can't do much with God can God wants the insignificant and to him there are spikers as those who are important in the eyes of the world we don't know very much else of it he may have been a cousin of

our Lord but the fact that he may have been a cousin wasn't enough to save him our connections will never save us we need

Christ to save us then there is Thaddeus or described elsewhere as Nebius or Judas not Ascariot again two things about him one we discover that he also was a person who realised his own ignorance but was willing to learn and the name that is called here is a name that really means big heart somebody who had a big heart and men and women with a big heart that Christ calls to follow him are you of a big enough heart to follow the Lord now we want to go one of them will deal with Sion the Canaanite perhaps better translated as the NIV has it here and as the AV has it in Luke [ 37 : 25 ] Simon the Salad now that means this Simon was somebody who was a strong nationalist he hated the woman taken to do with his own homeland and he was a person who was politically involved in trying to defend the rights of his own country and Christ told him to follow him and his seal which he had hitherto channeled in a political direction was now to be channeled in a direction that was to the glory of God and I think that before we move on to look at Judas Iscariot but I need to make this comment as we survey the eleven men that we have considered thus far we see the different types that

Jesus called indeed we can say more than that not only were they different but in many ways they were the exact opposites of one another there was Matthew who served the roads there was Simon who hated the roads political opposites united in the fellowship of the disciples doesn't matter what your political outlook is doesn't matter whether you're wet blue or whatever all one in Christ Jesus the love of God pulls all these barriers down and unites us together among the disciples there are those who seem to hop the night among the disciples there are those of whom we know next to nothing and yet they all fall apart of the body of believers upon whom

Jesus Christ was to build his church and now we come to the tragedy we come to the man who I think is the most pityable person in the whole of the word of God Judas Iscariot who also betrayed what can we say about him and it's very interesting that the Bible describes Judas in ways that are not at all flattering and yet not one not one of the disciples realised that they had an ascariot in their midst until the betrayal not one of them realised that the man whom they entrusted with that money was at heart a dishonest man they didn't realise his apothec until his cover was blown we know how his cover was blown we know the story of the betrayal we know too that the Bible tells us that after the betrayal Judas was full of remorse but he didn't find the place of repentance we know that the Bible tells us that Judas the scariot the dagger man took his own life at the end of the day and the Bible tells us in the most solemn statement that I find anywhere from Genesis to Revelation that he went to his own place and we all know that statement is telling us and yet the question remains why did Jesus call you why was this character found among the disciples now you remember that

Jesus has taught us that there always will be the tears along with the wheat and that he tells us that the tears will remain with the wheat until the reaper comes and then the two are separated from one another forever he and others are involved in what we call scandals now I know that crewmen of God can lose their feet as Simon Peter did but hallelujah they find them again they're restored there are others who are found out and people are agog and people are amazed that ministers should fall in the way some of them do and for all of us we must never think that we're beyond the possibility of poverty he that thinks his standing had better take heat lest he fall and yet we shouldn't be shell shocked when we discover frauds and hypocrites within the church and within the ministry there was one among the original twelve and it would appear as if the church of Jesus Christ will always have a problem with this kind of individual but I would say this tonight as I finish having attempted to present you with the characters of these twelve men that although Judas was called and although he made even have been used of God in bringing others to Jesus at the end of the day he was found out all you say surely Judas Iscariot couldn't have brought anyone to Christ could he not? [ 44 : 52 ] God can use any means to bring people to Christ God can use a church bell to bring people to hear his word and become left doesn't say that the church bell is a Christian that the church bell is like according to Jesus who he Trump didn't believe in his name and the church bell who knows that the church would therefore be to be Keller to face and to call people in various shoes may come I come I love And I want I ■■■■■ in the more