Rock Valley Bible Church (www.rvbc.cc)

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The Apostles of Jesus Christ Identified

Matthew 10:1-4

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As a pastor of a church, I get bombarded with all types of material from various organizations who, for a nice fee, would be eager to help our church attain its goals. Last year I received a brochure, which advertised a special one-day seminar. This seminar was being held in 28 different cities all across the United States, and it was entitled, "The 4 Laws of Effective Outreach." Here is what it said it would teach me:

> "Empower your church to reach more people for Christ and connect them to your congregation."
> "Discover the innovative strategies that are empowering more than 4,000 churches to effectively reach out to their communities"

The organizers of this seminar had come up with four "laws" that would guide me towards accomplishing those things. Here is what the four "laws" were:

> Law 1: Create an identity for outreach
> Law 2: Attract visitors by communicating your identity
> Law 3: Connect attenders to your church
> Law 4: Equip members to be inviters

As I looked at these laws and thought about Rock Valley Bible Church, I found that we are doing all of these things.

1. We have an identity at Rock Valley Bible Church. We believe that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This is the cry of the Reformation, and is the heartbeat of the doctrines of grace. It is a big part of our identity. Further, we are committed to preaching the Bible expositionally, verse-by-verse. At the Reformation, the reformers articulated that our faith was Sola-Scriptura, in the Scriptures alone. Verse-by-verse preaching helps us to focus on the truth of the Scriptures. These things identify us, and we have communicated them through the phone book, website, brochures, and business cards.

2. We have attracted visitors precisely because of our identity. As I have spoken to those who have visited our church, I have found out that the phone book and the web-site have been instrumental in leading them to come visit. They have been attracted to visit because we believe and teach the doctrines of grace here; we teach salvation by grace alone. They have been attracted to visit because of our commitment to preach verse-by-verse. They have been attracted to visit because they may be familiar with John MacArthur and they heard that I graduated from the Master's Seminary.

3. We seek to connect those who visit our church with those who attend our church. We have had visitors in our home for lunch on Sunday afternoon. I have encouraged you to reach out to those who visit our church. I have encouraged you to involve yourself in the lives of others in the church and include those who visit. I have told visitors to our church that if they want to get involved, all they need to do is stand around after church, and they will be "swallowed" by those in our church. When people start attending a church, their involvement in the lives of other people is crucial.

4. We have equipped members to be inviters. I have constantly encouraged you all to be bold in speaking of Christ. Be bold in speaking of our church. We have these little business cards in the back that many of us handout to people whenever we get a chance. We use them as an easy way to tell someone we know about our church and invite them to come.

I thought this over a bit, and I concluded that I was in agreement with these "Four Laws of Effective Outreach." There is much truth to what they contain. Perhaps they help articulate and explain what we are doing on a practical level. But as I thought about it, I found that these "laws" are merely secondary to our purpose. We are doing these things because they are natural and appropriate, but I don't think that these things are driving us. What drives us is Jesus Christ! As we have

come to know the grace of God as found in the cross of Jesus Christ, our response has been to gather together with others who believe likewise. As I communicated last week, we are a body of disciples of Jesus Christ. We are a group of men and women and children who have seen our sin and have seen the fount that can wash away our sin. That fount is the blood of Jesus. We believe that message. We have been transformed by the message. We desire above all else to be "conformed to the image of His Son" (Rom. 8:29). We know that our gathering with other believers is right and aids us on the way to that final day when we will be presented before Jesus, "having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing" (Eph. 5:27). We will be "holy and blameless" before Him (Eph. 5:27).

As His disciples, it is our task to make disciples of others so that "Thy way may be known on the earth, Thy salvation among all nations" (Ps. 67:2). We spread the news of the gospel of Christ that others might become His worshipers throughout all eternity! **This is what drives us: Jesus Christ and His saving work upon the cross**. Jesus' methods drive us as well. We do not need to look to One-Day seminars to build Rock Valley Bible Church. We need to look at the method of our Master. Jesus' method for ministry is found in Matthew, chapter 10. In that chapter, we find Jesus gathering His 12 disciples (Matt. 10:1-4), instructing His 12 disciples (Matt. 10:5-42), and sending out His 12 disciples "to teach and preach" (Matt. 10:5; 11:1). From these verses, we obtain insight into Jesus' methodology that He used to spread the good news of the kingdom.

> Matthew 10:1-4
> And having summoned His twelve disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-gatherer; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.

The method that Jesus used in His ministry was disciples. This morning, I want us to examine five lessons of discipleship.

1. Jesus Chose His Disciples Prayerfully (Luke 6:12)

We see in verse 1 that Jesus "summoned His twelve disciples." Jesus gathered the twelve disciples to Himself for a special time of teaching and training before He

would send them out. Matthew gives us very little detail about the selection process of these men. But Luke tells us a bit more about this serious matter of calling His disciples. Luke tells us that the before Jesus selected these men, He spent the entire night in prayer to God. We read in Luke 6:12, "And it was at this time that [Jesus] went off to the mountain to pray and He spent the whole night in prayer to God." Jesus was practicing what He was preaching. We learned last week that the way to reach the multitudes of people, is to pray. Jesus had taught that "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest" (Matt. 9:37-38). I believe that this is what Jesus was doing as He spent the night in prayer. He was praying that the Lord of the harvest would send forth His laborers into the harvest. This was the strategy of Jesus. The multitudes around Him were great! The need was overwhelming. So, Jesus was praying for the laborers who would come along side of Him in His earthly ministry. Having prayed, Jesus chose these twelve men to help Him in His ministry.

There is an application for us in what we have just read. We need to identify the leaders of this congregation carefully and prayerfully. As we look to the Lord to raise up other elders and deacons in our midst, we need to do so carefully. We need to do it by examining the qualifications given in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. And we need to do this prayerfully, seeking the Lord's guidance in all of these matters. These disciples that Jesus chose would be the future leaders of the church. They would be the instruments through which God would turn the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

2. Jesus Focused His Attention on a Few (verse 1)

After Jesus spent the entire night praying, Luke tells us that "when day came, He called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, whom He also named as apostles" (Luke 6:13). Apparently, Jesus had many disciples following Him. In Matthew, we have read already of the "multitudes" that surrounded Jesus. He preached the Sermon on the Mount in the presence of the "multitudes" (Matt. 5:1) who were amazed at His teaching (Matt. 7:28). When the leper approached Jesus, there were "great multitudes" who followed Him (Matt. 8:1). When Jesus healed the paralytic, the "multitudes" were present (Matt. 9:8). The "multitudes marveled" at the healing authority of Jesus (Matt. 9:33). Some of these people in the multitudes were Pharisees, who sought to trap Jesus in His words. Yet certainly, there was some percentage of these people who were following Jesus and could rightly be called, "disciples." A "disciple" is simply one who believes on Jesus, follows Him, and learns from Him. Luke describes this perfectly. Luke says, "He

called His disciples to Him; and chose twelve of them, who He also named as apostles" (Luke 6:13). In Matthew 10:2-4, we find the 12 disciples of Jesus identified by name. They are called "apostles", which is to mean they were "sent out." You read any of the gospels -- Matthew, Mark, Luke or John -- and you will discover the same strategy in all of them. Jesus sought to impact the world by focusing His attention upon a few, key men.

Jesus was with His disciples often. Throughout the gospel accounts, we see disciples with Jesus all the time. When Jesus crossed the sea of Galilee on several occasions, it was always with His 12 disciples (Matt. 8:23; 14:22). He retreated with them to Caesarea Philippi (Matt. 16:13). When Jesus celebrated the Passover before His death, it was with the 12 disciples (Matt. 26:20). In fact, you can hardly find a time in which Jesus is apart from His disciples because they forsook everything to follow Him. At one point, Peter said, "We have left everything and followed you" (Matt. 19:27).

Jesus taught His disciples privately. There were times that Jesus spoke publicly to the crowds, after which the disciples of Jesus came up to Him privately to ask what He meant when He said certain things. After preaching the parable of the sower and the soils to the multitudes (Matt. 13:1), the 12 disciples came up to Jesus and asked Him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" (Matt. 13:10). Jesus answered that to the disciples it has been granted them to know the meaning of the parables, but not to others (Matt. 13:11). After preaching the parable of the tares of the field to the multitudes, Jesus' disciples came again to Jesus and asked for an explanation of the parable in private (Matt. 13:36).

After it was revealed to Peter that Jesus was the Christ, Matthew tells us that "from that time Jesus Christ began to show His disciples but not the multitudes that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised up on the third day" (Matt. 16:21). Later we are told, "As Jesus was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will deliver Him to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up'" (Matt. 20:17-19). When Jesus spoke on the end times, it was to His disciples, "privately" on the Mount of Olives (Matt. 24:3). Jesus was revealing these things first to His disciples, that they might later proclaim it to the world.

Jesus involved His disciples in ministry. Remember when the crowds needed to be fed? It was the disciples that distributed the bread and the fish (Matt. 14:19; 15: 36). When Jesus needed a donkey to enter Jerusalem, He sent two of the twelve to retrieve the donkey (Matt. 21:2). When the Passover needed to be prepared, Jesus sent His disciples ahead to prepare it (Matt. 26:17-19).

Jesus focused even more attention upon three of His disciples. Peter, James and John seem to be particularly intimate with Jesus. Jesus took only these three up to the mount when He was transfigured. Jesus took only these three into Jairus' house to raise his daughter. Jesus took only these three to be closer to Him when He prayed in the garden. Jesus' strategy to impact the world was to impact a few men greatly. Jesus understood that the smaller the group being taught, the more intimate and effective was the instruction. When Jesus left the earth, He left with only a few men, who were well-trained and well-prepared for the mission to which Jesus called them-- world-wide evangelism.

This model of ministry contains application for us. The most effective churches I have seen are the churches that have focused their attention upon training a few who are so impacted by the message of the gospel that they would die for it. These few, then, start going out and multiplying themselves in the church. These few have been impacted greatly, so they go and impact a few others. All of a sudden, the vision spreads. People start taking their Bibles seriously. People embrace God' s grace in their lives. People come to see the glory of the cross of Jesus Christ. People come to see that their living hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ empowers them to live holy and obedient lives (1 Peter 1:4, 14).

The strategy of our ministry at Rock Valley Bible Church should be on the few, who can impact the few, who can impact the few. In other words, we need to multiply our ministry. We need to do what Paul teaches in 2 Tim 2:2, "And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also." If I have 12 disciples, and each of them goes and makes 12 disciples who in turn have 12 disciples, do you know how many that is? It is 1,728 disciples!

My vision, as a pastor of this church, isn't to have everybody answer to me. This isn't what it is about. My vision is to focus my attention upon the maturity of the few, who will, in turn, impact the others. Last week, I spoke about the future potential of us starting a "flocks" ministry. By "flocks," I simply mean home fellowship groups, where our numbers can be smaller. As more and more people

come, we need some way to meet with smaller numbers of people, as Jesus did. These home fellowship groups will allow us to take this larger group of people here on Sunday morning and break it down into smaller groups where there can be more personal interaction. These groups will help us to meet practical needs in the church. It will help us cultivate a love toward one another, and provide training grounds for future shepherds in the church. When we start a ministry like this, I know we will not get everyone to be involved. But, those who will be involved will be the few who will be key to growing and maintaining our passion for the truth and for each other.

3. Jesus' Disciples Were to Represent Him (verse 1)

Let us take another look at Matthew 10:1. It says Jesus "gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness" (Matt. 10:1). Jesus gave the disciples the authority to do everything that Jesus could do.

The disciples represented Christ**by their works**. We have seen in chapters 8 and 9 that Jesus was casting out unclean spirits, healing disease, and healing sickness. If you look at chapter 9, verse 35, you will find that the same phraseology is being used with respect to Jesus. Jesus was "healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness" (Matt. 9:35). The parallel between what Jesus could do and what His disciples could do is unmistakable. I think that the point is that they were to go out and represent Jesus. Concerning the Messiah, the prophet Isaiah prophesized:

> The eyes of the blind will be opened,
> And the ears of the deaf will be unstopped.
> Then the lame will leap like a deer,
> And the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy. (Is. 35:5-6).

The disciples were to go about and do these wondrous things to verify that the Messianic age had dawned. When the disciples were asked, "How do you do these things?", they would reply that it was through Jesus. These miracles were confirming evidences of the Messianic Age. These miracles testified that God’s kingdom had come upon Israel. Hebrews 2:4 says that God was "bearing witness with [those who first preached the gospel] both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will." Miracles pointed to the presence of the Messiah, which pointed to Jesus.

The disciples also represented Christ **by their words**. When the disciples went out and preached, they were to represent Jesus. This is the point of verse 7, "As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Their message was to point to Jesus, as the King, who was among them. Let us examine some of the verses ahead and read Jesus' instruction to the disciples.

> "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves; therefore be shrewd as serpents, and innocent as doves. But beware of men; for they will deliver you up to the courts, and scourge you in their synagogues; and you shall even be brought before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them and to the Gentiles" (Matt. 10:16-18).

The words that the disciples speak are to give testimony to Jesus. There is this sense that as the disciples go out and preach to others, they are doing so "for Jesus' sake." They are representatives of Jesus. They were not to go off on their own. They will be delivered up to the courts and scourged in the synagogues because they were representing Jesus. Look at verse 40, "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me." The idea here is that the disciples were to go and represent Jesus Christ to these people. To receive an apostle of Jesus was to receive Jesus Himself. This is because they were not propagating their own agenda, but they were representing Jesus.

The application for us is clear. We are not ambassadors of Rock Valley Bible Church. We are ambassadors of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Cor. 4:5). We are not about bringing attention to ourselves. We are all about bringing attention to Jesus.

> Consider your calling, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are, that no man should boast before God. By His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption, that just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

The people that God calls to salvation are weak and despised and have no right in themselves to boast of anything before God. Consider these verses:

> "By His doing you are in Christ Jesus" (verse 30).
> "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord" (verse 31).
> "May it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Gal. 6:14).
> "From Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever" (Rom. 11:36).

The gospel of God is not new. It has been "promised beforehand through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures" (Rom. 1:2). The gospel of God is all about Jesus "who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3). He was a real man, who came as a real king. He "was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead" (Rom. 1:4). He was God in the flesh, whom death could not contain. It was He who was "Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 1:4). He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. It is through Jesus "whom we have received grace and apostleship" (Rom. 1:5). The gospel was God's idea, and not ours. The gospel is God's grace come upon us "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles," (Rom. 1:5). God poured out His grace upon us to show us our sin, to show us our need of a Savior, to grant us repentance, and to empower us to the obedience that comes by faith!

The gospel is all about Jesus. We are products of His grace. We are to "proclaim Him" (Col. 1:28). As the disciples went about healing people, they were doing what Jesus had been doing. They gave testimony to the wondrous works of Christ.

4. Jesus' Disciples Were Men (verse 2-4)

The list of the disciples' names appears in verses 2-4.

> Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-gatherer; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. (Matt. 10:2-4)

It is a simple observation that all of Jesus' disciples were men. I do not think that it was an accident that Jesus focused His attention upon 12 men. Some in our culture today object that Jesus had no choice but to choose 12 men due to the culture of

Jesus' day. They argue that the culture of Jesus' day would have prohibited involving any women as His disciples. My response to that is simply, "when did Jesus ever capitulate to culture?" The culture did not prohibit Him from calling 6 men and 6 women as disciples. The wisdom of God prohibited Him from calling 6 men and 6 women as disciples, because God has always called men to lead. Here is the principle: The church is led by men.

Men are responsible to lead in their families. A husband is called the head of his wife. Husbands have authority over their wives. Husbands are responsible for the direction of the home. Their leadership is to be self-sacrificing leadership. Ephesians 5:25 says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her." Their leadership is to be loving, caring, sensitive leadership. Ephesians 5:28 says, "Husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies."

Men are responsible to lead in the church. God has given the church two offices: elder and deacon. In both of these instances, we find that a man, not a woman, is to hold these offices (1 Timothy 3; Titus 1). Their leadership is to be self-sacrificing leadership. Jesus said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant" (Matt. 20:25-26). Their leadership is to be loving, caring, sensitive leadership. Peter told his fellow elders, "shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness" (1 Peter 5:2).

In saying men are to lead the church, I want to be sensitive so that you understand what I am saying. It does not follow from these things that women are inferior to men. You cannot accurately say that the role of women in the home and in the church is inferior and to be despised and looked down upon. Indeed, the Scriptures say that the wife is the glory of her husband (1 Cor 11:7), and that the wife is to be treasured and honored (1 Pet. 3:7).

In Men's Equippers we have been studying these things. For those whose husbands have come, I trust, that you have a better husband today than you had two months ago. I have been challenging the men with a sheet of paper entitled, "Specific Ways to Demonstrate Love to Your Wife" (as taken from The Complete Husband, by Lou Priolo, pp. 259-265). It gives 108 specific ways to demonstrate sacrificial, sensitive love toward wives. I have challenged the men to go over this paper with their wives. I have told them to tell their wives, "Help me in loving you

sacrificially. Let's go over this list together. I want you to evaluate me. Tell me how good or bad I am doing with each of these. Give me a few of these things that I can work on."

I have pressed the men on this because this is what the Bible teaches about a man's relationship to his wife. He is the loving leader in the home. A husband ought to measure his love for his wife with the love of Christ for His church. Christ loves the church supremely. He literally died for the church. Men ought to be willing to do the same. Husbands are to die to themselves in loving and serving their wives. So, when I say that men are to lead in the home, we should realize that it is a good thing. When I say that men are to lead in the church, we should realize that it is equally a good thing. It is the way that God has ordained the church to be. This is why Jesus chose 12 men to be His disciples.

Jesus' ministry demonstrates that He never looked down upon women. He ministered to women with compassion. Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law so that she could continue in her ministry to Jesus (Matt. 8:14-15). Jesus had compassion upon the widow whose child had died (Luke 7:11-15). On the Sabbath, Jesus chose to heal a woman who was bent over for 18 years. He did this much to the dismay of the hostile religious leaders (Luke 13:10-17). When the synagogue official objected, Jesus called her "a daughter of Abraham," demonstrating that she stood as equal with anyone as a child of God's covenant people. Jesus healed the woman who had a hemorrhage for 12 years (Matt. 9:20-22). He stopped to make sure that the crowds knew that her faith had made her well. Jesus showed great mercy to the Canaanite woman whose daughter was demon-possessed (Matt. 15: 21-28). Jesus brought the gospel to a Samaritan woman, defying all social customs (John 4:7-26). Jews, on the other hand, had no dealings with Samaritans (John 4:9) and often despised women (John 4:27). The gifts of women in part helped support Jesus' ministry financially (Luke 8:1-3). Women were chosen to be key witnesses of the resurrection. They lovingly came to anoint His body at the tomb (Matt. 28:1-10).

The issue before us this morning is simply one of leadership. The issue is not ability, desire, or superiority. Jesus' disciples were men because the leaders in the home and the leaders in the church are to be men.

The application to many of these truths has already been quite evident. But let me give you one more. As a pastor, my focus is upon the men of the church. Jesus focused the majority of His attention upon the men who would eventually lead the church. I believe that this is a good model for pastors to follow. It is no accident

that we have "Men's Equippers." My strategy is simple. Men are to be leaders in the home. If I get the men, I get the home. Men are to be leaders in the church. I need to train the leaders of this church. This is not to say that I am to neglect the ladies in our congregation. It is simply to say that my focus is and will continue to be upon the men. My priorities lie here.

Yet, my first priority is to a woman! She is my wife, who is sitting in the front row. To neglect her is to destroy my ministry here at RVBC. Men, likewise, you first priority is to your wife. May she feel it!

5. Jesus' Disciples Were Ordinary Men (verses 2-4)

There was nothing extraordinary about them. Most of them were "uneducated and untrained men" (Acts 4:13). Jesus did not pull them out from a book called "The Top 100 Leaders in Jerusalem" or "Who's Who in Jerusalem." He did not find them in big businesses or in the top universities. They were just ordinary men. Their names are...

> Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax-gatherer; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him. (Matt. 10:2-4)

The first four names listed in this group were names of men who were fishermen. Peter and Andrew were brothers. James and John were brothers who had some wealth in their family. Apparently their father was wealthy enough to own his own fishing business (Mark 1:18-20). When they were called, "they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants." Philip and Bartholomew are always listed together. Some believe that both of these men were also fishermen. In John 21:2-3, Bartholomew (who is also called Nathanael) went back to fishing with the other disciples after Jesus' death. We know nothing of the background of Thomas. Matthew was a rich, despised, tax-collector, before following Jesus. We know hardly anything of James the son of Alphaeus and Thaddaeus. Simon is identified as "the Zealot," which describes his religious zeal or his membership in the party of the Zealots who were a revolutionary political group who opposed Roman rule. Judas Iscariot betrayed Jesus, but we know nothing of his background.

Up to half of these men were blue-collar fishermen. One was linked politically with the Romans in a way that caused other Jews to despise him. One hated the Romans. These men were not even particularly like-minded with each other.

The behavior of these men was not exactly meritorious. We often can think of Peter as "Saint Peter." We often can think of the others as "Saint Andrew, Saint James, and Saint John." The word "saint" simply means, "holy one." These men were "saints" the same way that we are "saints." We are "holy ones" because God has made us holy through faith in Christ Jesus. The personal reality of these men is that they often exhibited quite sinful behavior.

In his list of disciples, Matthew identifies **Peter** as "the first." Peter was not the first disciple called. Rather, he was the disciple that stands at the head of the pack. He was the leader. The Greek word used here is prwtoV, which means, "first" or "chief" or "greatest." Peter was the leader of the disciples. He is the one who showed great initiative. He was a man of action. This was his greatest strength. At times, his greatest strength actually became his greatest weakness. He was the bold one, who walked upon the water toward Jesus but began to sink because of his little faith (Matt. 14:28-31). On the one hand, Peter spoke by revelation of God, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." Yet, only a few moments later, he spoke for Satan when Jesus revealed that He must suffer, Peter replied, "God forbid it, Lord!" (Matt. 16:16, 22). At one moment, Peter would boldly declare, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You." Yet a few hours later, Peter denied Jesus three times! (Matt. 26:25, 75).

James and John sent their mother to request that they have a place of special prominence in the kingdom (Matt. 20:20-23). The other disciples were stirred to anger (Matt. 20:24). Jesus had to correct their thinking that the one who wishes to be greatest shall be a servant and "whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave" (Matt. 20:26, 27). John tried to hinder someone casting out demons in Jesus' name. Jesus said, "Do not hinder him, for there is no one who shall perform a miracle in My name, and be able soon afterward to speak evil of Me." (Mark 9: 38,39). When the Samaritans did not receive Jesus, James and John were outraged. They said, "Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Luke 9:54). This was misdirected zeal on the part of James and John. Jesus turned and rebuked them, "You do not know what kind of Spirit you are of; For the Son of man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (Luke 9:55-56). Jesus called these two men "Sons of Thunder!" (Mark 3:17).

Philip sat under the teaching of Jesus for three years, and yet still expressed doubts of Jesus during Jesus' last supper on earth (John 14:8). **Thomas** is known for his doubt (John 20:24-29). **Matthew** was a notorious sinner. **Judas Iscariot** would betray Jesus, which Jesus knew from the beginning (John 6:64, "For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him"). Judas wasn't chosen to be an apostle because of merit.

These were not extraordinary men, but they were committed to following Jesus at all costs. Back in Matthew, chapter 4, we see Jesus calling four of His disciples. We read ...

> And walking by the Sea of Galilee, He saw two brothers, Simon who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. And He *said to them, "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." And they immediately left the nets, and followed Him. And going on from there He saw two other brothers, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and He called them. And they immediately left the boat and their father, and followed Him" (Matt. 4:18-22).

In Matthew, chapter 9, verse 9, we see Jesus calling Matthew.

> And as Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man, called Matthew, sitting in the tax office; and He said to him, "Follow Me!" And he rose, and followed Him. (Matt. 9:9)

These disciples left everything to follow Jesus. There was a point in Jesus' ministry when Peter affirmed their commitment to follow Jesus. He said, "We have left everything and followed you" (Matt. 19:27). In this, the disciples were to be commended. Jesus had plainly told His disciples what the very cost of following Him was.

> "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it. For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Matt. 16:24-26).

Jesus' disciples understood this. They were not meritorious of God's grace, but they gave of themselves completely. They were not of noble rank or privilege, but they gave up everything to follow Jesus. This is what Jesus demands of us! He demands that you forsake your life entirely!

According to *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, ten of these twelve disciples were martyred for their faith in Christ. Herod Agrippa put James to death with a sword in 44 A.D. You can read about it in Acts 12:2. Ten years later, in Phrygia, Philip was "scourged, thrown into prison, and afterwards crucified" (54 A. D.). Matthew was martyred with a battle-axe in Ethiopia in 60 A.D. James the son of Alphaeus was beaten and stoned by the Jews. Andrew went to Asia to preach. He was crucified on a cross that looked like an "X". Peter was crucified upside down in Rome, because he thought himself to be unworthy to be crucified after the same form and manner as his Lord was. Thaddeus was crucified in Edessa in 72 A. D. Bartholomew was cruelly beaten and crucified by idolaters in India. Thomas was thrust through with a spear in India. Simon the zealot was crucified in Britain in 74 A. D. Only two of the twelve disciples were not martyred for their faith. Judas betrayed Jesus. John lived out his days in exile on the island of Patmos.

To be a disciple cost these men everything! They were ordinary men, like you and me. But they had a love for Jesus Christ, which ended up costing most of them their lives.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 2, 2003 by Steve Brandon.
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