

LUKE

“God’s People”

Luke 6:12-19

Sunday, September 24, 2017

By David A. Ritchie

This week’s Scripture reading is from the Gospel According to Luke, in the sixth Chapter, beginning in verse twelve:

¹² In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. ¹³ And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles: ¹⁴ Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, ¹⁵ and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, ¹⁶ and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

¹⁷ And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, ¹⁸ who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. ¹⁹ And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.¹

Almighty and Everlasting God, we thank you that you have revealed yourself through the gift of your Holy Word. May the same Holy Spirit who inspired these words breathe upon our hearts this day. As we look into your Scriptures may our eyes be illuminated to see you are, who we are called to be as your people, and what our place is in this world and in your kingdom. We pray this in Jesus’s mighty name. AMEN.

I. Introduction

Imagine being a somewhat popular physical education teacher who walks onto an elementary school playground. Several of the older students are playing tag, while others are throwing and catching an oblong pigskin ball. From these students, you choose eleven – no more, no less. You begin to line them up and set them in a familiar formation. Without even having to say the name of the sport, anyone vaguely familiar with the game would no exactly what you have just done. You haven’t just picked eleven kids and separated them for the group. You have created a football team.²

In the same way, here in Luke chapter 6, even though Jesus does not explicitly say so, anyone in the ancient vaguely familiar with the story of Israel would have recognized what Jesus has just done. The moment Jesus descends from the mountain and picks a group of twelve – no more, no less – you would have recognized that Jesus has *recreated Israel*. He has begun a new work in **“The People of God.”**

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton: Standard Bible Society, 2016), Lk 6:12–19.

² N.T. Wright makes use of this helpful illustration in his short commentary on Luke, as he introduces the “Sermon on the Plain.” Tom Wright, [Luke for Everyone](#) (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 70–71.

Now it has been several months, since we last engaged the book of Luke together as a congregation, so allow me for a moment to build some context for this event. Jesus of Nazareth has recently returned from being baptized by John the Baptist in the Judean wilderness. Upon his return to his home region of Galilee, he begins preaching in synagogues, where he is recognized as one who speaks with unignorable power. Even more, Jesus doesn't just speak with power, but he moves with power. He prays for the sick and they recover. He commands demons that are oppressing people to flee and they flee. So seemingly overnight, Jesus goes from being a new itinerant speaker to being a celebrity. Two effects flow from this: Jesus is now very popular, as well as very controversial.³ In fact, the last five stories prior to this moment are all back-to-back controversies between Jesus and the religious leaders of this day (Lk. 5:17-26; 27-32; 33-39; 6:1-5; 6-11).

But here is the thing about attracting both celebrity and controversy: it is very easy for people to misunderstand who you are. The crowds are recognizing that Jesus is some type of divinely appointed prophet. They are hoping that he might be a liberator or revolutionary leader, who will unite Israel to cast off the oppressive foreign rule of the Roman Empire. The religious leaders, on the other hand, seem to think Jesus is a presumptuous, populist heretic who will lead people to false doctrine and destruction.

So one way to understand what Jesus is doing here in Luke 6:12-19 is that he is showing everyone exactly what he is here to do on his own terms. He does so by recreating a scene from Exodus 19.

In Exodus 19 tells the story of Moses, who was an ancient prophet used by God to deliver the people of Israel out of slavery to the nation of Egypt. After God takes the nation of Israel out of Egypt he leads them to a mountain, and on this mountain, God speaks to Moses. He tells Moses that he is calling the twelve tribes of the people of Israel to be his people. He is choosing from all the nations of the world these *twelve tribes* of Israel to be his "holy nation" (Ex. 19:6). And the purpose of Israel will be to be God's people, who represent the kingdom of God to the nations.

Sadly, the story of Israel in the Old Testament is a story of all-too-familiar human failure. Israel ultimately fails in their call. Their kingdom is destroyed. They are scattered in exile. The Promise Land is placed under foreign rule. The prophets of God go silent. Until one day a voice begins to cry in the wilderness, and Jesus of Nazareth steps onto the scene.

Now, here in Luke 6, Jesus has just re-enacted this Exodus 19 moment. Upon a mountain, Jesus goes to speak with God. From here he chooses a group of twelve apostles, as a type of restored Israel. This means only one thing, God's kingdom is at hand; and, God is going to go about displaying his kingdom in and through the lives of his people.

However, as is the way with Jesus, not everything is going to happen the way the people expect. As much as Jesus is playing into the expectations and worldview of his surrounding culture, he is also going to subvert those expectations. Thus, following the moment of calling this group of twelve, Jesus gives one of his most famous sermons that gives a counter-cultural vision for what it means to be God's people. Thus, for the next four weeks, we will be exploring what it means to be God's people according to Jesus himself. And I want us to ask ourselves the question, how does Jesus vision for the people of God, give our congregation vision to be God's people in our time, in our place, in our city?

³ Fred B. Craddock, [Luke](#), Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 83–84.

For this week, however, I simply want to look at the text at hand, and draw out of it four truths of what it means to be the people of God: 1.) *God's People Are A Sent People*, 2.) *God's People Are An Unlikely People*, 3.) *God's People Are a Distinct People*, and 4.) *God's People Are A Jesus-Centered People*.

II. Text

1.) God's People Are A Sent People.

"In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles:" (Luke 6:12–13, ESV).

Notice Luke's word-choice. Jesus does not choose twelve disciples. Rather, from his disciples, Jesus chooses twelve apostles.

The word for apostle is the Greek word "ἀποστόλος (apostolos)," which comes from the Greek verb "ἀποστέλλω (apostellō)," which literally means "to send out."⁴ Thus, the apostles are by nature "sent ones." Later in the gospel of Luke, Jesus will *send* these twelve apostles to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal (Lk. 9:1-6). Then, he *sends* seventy-two of his disciples to proclaim his coming (Lk. 10:1-12). And finally, Luke who is also the author of the New Testament book of Acts, describes how Jesus *sends* the first 120 believers to be his witnesses in "*Jerusalem and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth*" (Acts 1:8).

The Old Testament people of God represented God's kingdom within a "come and see" paradigm (see 1 Kings 10:1-13). But the New Testament people of God are called to represent God's kingdom within a "go a display" paradigm.

The pattern here is consistently displayed in the New Testament. Discipleship leads to sending, and all of God's people are to see themselves as being sent.

We do not exist for our own comfort, entertainment, or significance. We exist to participate in the mission of God. This determines the way we see the church. Are we going to be a church that caters to the variously competing preferences of Christians? Or are we going to be a church that is mobilized to reach people who don't know Jesus? Because those are two very different types of churches.

Likewise, this determines the way we seek our individual lives. If you are part of God's people, you have been providentially placed in your family, your friend-group, your neighborhood, your

⁴ "ἀποστόλος (apostolos). n. masc. messenger, apostle. One sent out; in the NT, especially those sent out by Jesus to preach the gospel. This word is related to the verb ἀποστέλλω (apostellō, "to send out"), and, in the extrabiblical sources, it has the meaning of "something sent" (e.g., a naval expedition; Plato, Ep., 7, 346a) or "someone sent out" (Josephus, Ant. 17.300). In the NT, this word only occasionally indicates "personal messenger" (John 13:16; Phil 2:25). The majority of the occurrences of this term are references to the 12 disciples whom Jesus sent out (apostellō) to preach the gospel (e.g., Mark 3:14); they continued to do so after he died (Acts 5:40). The work of the apostles (apostolos) and the prophets (προφήτης, prophētēs) of the early church created a firm foundation for the church to grow (Eph 2:20)." Craig A. Smith, "[Church Leadership](#)," ed. Douglas Mangum et al., *Lexham Theological Wordbook*, Lexham Bible Reference Series (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2014).

apartment building, and your vocation to display the kingdom of God.

Doctor Edmund P. Clowney says it this way: *“God accomplishes his saving mission by sending his Son into the world. Jesus is the great Missionary, sent by the Father. As Lord, Jesus comes to gather his people, and to form his disciples as a company of gatherers...Jesus came to gather, and to call gatherers, disciples who would gather with him, seeking the poor and helpless from city streets and country roads...Mission is not an optional activity for Christ’s disciples.”*⁵

2.) God’s People Are An Unlikely People.

Let’s for a moment look at the list of people listed here: *“Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew his brother, and James and John, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon who was called the Zealot, and Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor”* (Luke 6:14–16, ESV).

God’s people have always been an unlikely people. Abraham was an old childless man that God chose to be the father of nations. Israel was a nation of slaves that God chose to be a kingdom of priests. This is something God reminds his people of: *“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples”* (Deuteronomy 7:6–7, ESV).

Here too, in Luke 6, God chooses the unlikely and the unworthy to be his apostles. He does not choose the cream of the crop. He does not get the very smartest Pharisees or the most pureblooded priests. He chooses fishermen. Why does God do this? *He chooses the unlikely and the unworthy to display his grace.*

Here is what Paul says to the church in Corinth: *“For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord’”* (1 Corinthians 1:26–31, ESV).

This is profoundly good news. *Because no matter who you are or whatever your background may be, you have can have a place and a purpose among God’s people.*

Another key part of this text that is easy to miss is that this list of disciples includes two men who would have definitely seen each other as enemies – Matthew the tax collector and Simon the zealot (Lk. 6:15). To be a tax collector meant that Matthew actively supported and even helped to fund the Roman Empire and its occupation of Palestine. To be a zealot meant that Simon actively supported the overthrow of Roman rule through insurrection and force. These are not natural friends. These are natural enemies. Nevertheless, these men are called to lay down their vision of the earthly kingdom

⁵ Edmund P. Clowney. *The Church*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 159.

for the sake of the kingdom of Jesus.

This is something that our world aches for, and it is something that only the gospel can do. A great portion of the New Testament addresses the reality of how Jews and Gentiles – people who by nature are enemies opposed to one another – can live as one united people in Christ (see Eph. 2:17-21).

God's people are designed to embody a unity and community built on Jesus; a unity that is not uniformity, but rather a glorious diversity that finds its center in Jesus. When God's people rise to the occasion of this call, Scripture elsewhere says such a church displays to the spiritual realm the manifold wisdom of God (cf. Eph. 3:10).

3.) God's People Are A Distinct People.

Let's continue in our text: *"And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all"* (Luke 6:17-19, ESV).

New Testament scholar Robert Stein notes that "Three groups are mentioned in this verse: them (the Twelve apostles), a large crowd of disciples, and a great number of people. This may reflect an understanding of society as consisting of the apostles, the church, and the world."⁶

The idea here is that there should be a discernable, visible difference between God's people and the world. The biblical word for this distinctiveness is "holiness."

Nevertheless, though God's people are called to not be of the world, we are called to be in the world (see Jn. 17:15-16). We are not called to be separatists. As Dr. Russell D. Moore writes: *"Our call is to an engaged alienation, a Christianity that preserves the distinctiveness of our gospel while not retreating from our callings as neighbors, friends, and citizens."*⁷

4.) God's People Are A Jesus-Centered People.

Our text ends with a simple but powerful vision: *"And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all"* (Luke 6:19, ESV).

The idea here is simple. God's people exist is to bring a hurting world to Jesus.

The problems haven't changed. People are still in pain. People are still spiritual oppressed. People are still broken and in need of healing. And we as the people of God have no real ability in and of ourselves to do much of anything, because we are often broken too. And our resources are limited.

But although the problem hasn't changed the mission hasn't changed either. Our only power is to bring people to Jesus.

⁶ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 196.

⁷ Russell D. Moore. *Onward: Engaging the Culture without Losing the Gospel*. (Nashville: B&H, 2015), 8.

And the only way we can bring people to Jesus is if our lives are centered on Jesus. Our world will try to center our lives on comfort, control, political fear, and our careers. But the people of God are called to be centered on Jesus – his life, his death, his resurrection, his ascension, and the expectation of his return.

III. Conclusion

Yesterday, according to a small fringe group of televangelists and Christian numerologists, the Apocalypse was supposed to come. And as a general guideline I don't listen to people who are televangelists or Christian numerologist about anything. I do not want to mock or shame you if you got caught up in this stuff. But pastorally, I do want to humbly plead with you to stop listening to self-proclaimed "end-times experts" who have only built a career on outlandish and wrong predictions. Rather than trying figure out what day Revelation 12 will happen, we should try to figure out why Luke 6 isn't happening.

But anyway, the idea was the Apocalypse was supposed to happen yesterday. And if not the Apocalypse, the rapture, the beginning of the Great Tribulation, or something that would definitively signal the end of days. Instead, the only thing we got was a Twitter war between the President of the United States and several professional athletes. And no matter what your political leanings may be, I would hope we could all agree that this is a very sad and disappointing state of affairs for our nation.

But in a way, I think that every day in the news cycle in the recent months has been – in the truest sense of the word – *apocalyptic*. The word "apocalypse" simply means "to unveil"; that is, to lift back the curtain and be able to glimpse the true nature of things.

Recently our culture seems to be increasingly unveiled. And what is being revealed is very disturbing indeed. We are divided more than ever. We have lost sight of anything resembling the common good, and instead are only interested in short-term power gains and pointing fingers of blame when we fail. And meanwhile, while Mexico City is broken and Puerto Rico drowns and the shadow of nuclear war looms, we get hot and bothered about celebrity social media feuds.

It is the midst of this darkness the light of God's word shines so that God's people might be awakened from our slumber to embody a different type of kingdom than the kingdom of this world.

Let us take seriously the call of 1 Peter 4: *"The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen"* (1 Peter 4:7–11, ESV).

Community Group Discussion Questions

1. *From the group of his followers, Jesus chose twelve men to be apostles (see Luke 6:13). The word "apostle" literally means "one who is sent." How should God's people today view themselves as "sent ones"? How does being sent effect our vision for being God's people?*

2. *The twelve apostles consisted of unlikely fishermen, as well as men who would have been political enemies, such as Matthew the tax-collector and Simon the Zealot (see Luke 6:15). How should the church be a place where people from unlikely backgrounds and people who are natural enemies come together for the sake of Christ?*
3. *Luke 6:18 present Jesus's disciples and the multitudes of people who came to hear Jesus and be healed as two distinct groups. How should God's people seek to be noticeably distinct from the world, but at the same time remain faithful neighbors, friends, and citizens within the world?*