

THE RADICAL RABBI: "A RADICAL TEAM"

Mark 3:13-19

11.15.20

INTRODUCTION

Every year, every major sport holds some sort of "draft" - an event where each team gets to pick players, they believe will make them a better team well into the future. Some of those drafts are major, high-profile TV events that inspire "draft parties" where fans come together to cheer or boo their particular team's choices.

But this isn't just something we see in the pros. Colleges do something of the same thing; only they call it "recruiting." Coaches and others scour high schools from coast to coast to get commitments from top athletes to come to their schools - again with a hope of future success on the playing field.

But this isn't just seen in the sports world. Businesses screen candidates for high- end firms with the hope that somebody's joining their firm will ensure future success as they seek to maintain their status, and maybe even their dominance, in whatever business they function.

And those things just reflect our society at large. As a culture, we are always looking for the best - driving the best cars, getting the best jobs, having kids with the best grades, getting into the best colleges, living in the best places, having the best "toys," using the best tech, wearing the best looks.

What do all these pursuits have in common? They are seeking the best that can be found -the strongest, the fastest, the smartest. The latest and greatest. To be the best and stay the best, you have to grab the best. Obvious, right?

That's what makes our story today so interesting. Jesus took the world's priorities of what is important and what seems obvious and stood them on their collective heads. He connected a group of guys to Him that probably no one else on the planet would have ever given a thought to. But then, Jesus had His own outcome in mind - not the world's. So, as we begin, let's **start with a word of prayer.**

TEXT/ANALYSIS

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God - Luke 6:12.

One of the great examples that Jesus left His followers was His complete immersion at the most important times of His life in prayer to His Father - times such as His baptism, His transfiguration, and in Gethsemane just prior to His arrest. This story is another example of praying before an important event - calling twelve of His disciples into ministry. His time of being physically with them would be brief so He dedicated this time prior to calling them to being with His Father.

[When morning came] Jesus ... called to Him those He wanted, and they came to Him. He appointed twelve [whom He designated apostles] that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons -Mark 3:13-15.

Fortified by His night of prayer, Jesus identified from all those who were following Him some very specific guys He wanted. There would be 12 of them - a number that would be a reminder of the once and ongoing plan for God's ministry initially envisioned for the 12 tribes of God's

chosen people, the nation of Israel. These 12 He separated from all the others who had been with Him, suggesting that, for these He was calling, all past pursuits were now at an end, as He was calling them to ministry for Him. In this moment, His words of "Follow Me" took on a totally new, totally all-encompassing meaning. This wasn't going to be asking them to run some errands, or maybe even some kind of part-time gig. This was going to be a full-time, lifetime appointment. And this choice was made publicly and openly as witnessed by all those physically following Christ at this time. These guys were very literally apostles - "called out ones" - from this moment onward.

The Greek tells us that Christ "ordained" them, using a word that simply means "to make" - but what richness is being communicated by that word. What Christ is going to be doing is literally making them to be something new by making and building within them something completely new, something that will meet the needs of the Kingdom and its coming Church. The desired outcome? A ministry that reflects Jesus by creating lives that reflect Jesus. We call this "discipling." To do this, He is going to grace them with two experiences:

- 1) They are going to be "with Him." For the rest of Christ's physical time on earth, they are going to be living with Him. There are two primary reasons for this:
 - a) First, so they can constantly be available to be taught by Him. He will literally have "class time" with them so He can spell out the teachings of the kingdom of God.
 - b) Second, so they can by observing Jesus 24/7 get a sense of what a person belonging to the kingdom of God looks like. While with Him, His disciples will watch how He responds to His followers, His enemies, those who come to Him simply for an opportunity to be healed, and those who are completely unmoved by Christ. They will be able to see firsthand how He responds to good times and bad. They will learn what it means to live connected to their Heavenly Father. They will learn by observing how different the life of Christ is from anything else the world has ever known.
- 2) They will at various times be "sent out" from Him to minister for Him, in His name:
 - a) One form of that ministry will be to preach. The Greek word is "kerusso," meaning "to preach, to herald, to proclaim." To be a "herald" means to be a messenger proclaiming important news on behalf of a sovereign. They would be on a mission as the personal representative of the One sending them.
 - b) In addition, they will have opportunities to grace others with the same miracles that they have seen Jesus Himself provide - specifically, healing in both the physical (literally, healing all manners of disease and sickness) and spiritual senses - granted the power, in Jesus' name, to literally eject demonic spirits (all spirits working under Satan) from anybody. And, of course, they will be able to come back to Jesus to process and learn from all these experiences as well - always with an eye toward a future where Jesus will no longer be physically with them.

These are the twelve He appointed: Simon (to whom He gave the name Peter), James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them He gave the name Boanerges, which means "sons of thunder") Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew (Nathanael), Matthew (Levi), Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus (Judas son of James), Simon the Zealot and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Him - Mark 3:16-19.

So, who were these guys? Well, today we would think of them as lunch-pail, blue collar guys.

Some if not most of them were married, family men. Apart from the probable exception of Judas, all were from Galilee. Peter was a commercial fisherman, successful enough (along with his brother Andrew) to enter into a partnership with the brothers James and John in Capernaum. Andrew was originally one of John the Baptist's disciples before being directed by the Baptist to follow after Christ (as was possibly John). Peter, Andrew and Philip all came from the same hometown - Bethsaida. Along with Peter, Andrew, James and John, it is possible that Philip, Bartholomew and Thomas were fishermen as well. Matthew was a tax collector before becoming a disciple of Christ, and James the son of Alphaeus was possibly his brother. Most would have had little formal education outside of their professions. None lived lives of luxury. Aside from annual religious pilgrimages to Jerusalem, none of them would have likely traveled any significant distance from their homes. Bottom line: All of these guys were remarkably unremarkable - indistinguishable from anybody else at that time.

And, of course, they also came with their own set of character flaws - defects in their humanity that also made them like anybody else. Peter was ridiculously impulsive. The brothers James and John appeared to have some significant anger issues. Bartholomew was a skeptic, while Thomas was prone to doubting anything he couldn't see for himself. Judas Iscariot was a greedy thief. All of them struggled with moments of over-inflated egos, insecurity, and selfishness. All of them could be frustrating in their inability to both grasp Christ's teachings and live those teachings out. Following Christ's arrest, they would all show complete cowardice.

So, what did Christ see in them that others might miss? Remember the words of Christ's initial invitation to Peter and Andrew? ***"Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men"-Jesus Christ, Matthew 4:19 (NKJV)***. What better guys to make up the bulk of His disciples than guys who understood what being a fisherman meant. Being a fisherman in those days meant that some of the skills the disciples would need for the Kingdom had already gotten some trial runs, for instance:

- 1) They understood that success most often meant very hard work. Being a fisherman meant wrestling with hundreds of pounds of soaking wet nets and slippery, flip-flopping fish, and doing that in all kinds of weather conditions - both on the lake and with the work that followed.
- 2) They understood that success meant teamwork. A successful outcome required everybody's participation, relying on the skills and muscles and ideas of everybody in the boat. Success was everybody's success.
- 3) They understood that success meant patience. Not every "drop of the net" meant great results. Often, it was many drops of the net (and many hours) before a great catch would come their way.
- 4) They understood that success meant weathering the storms, and that success was often not so much about avoiding storms as it was learning to navigate through them.
- 5) They understood that the headline-grabbing "great catch" wouldn't happen unless all the other aspects of fishing - drying and repairing the nets, preparing the catch for market, repairing the boats and sails - were also done completely. Success meant that there were no unimportant details to making the fisherman's efforts successful.

But at the end of the day, bringing both some useful character traits as well as all the chinks we might find in their various armors, these 12 were, warts and all, the "crew" that Christ called to His side to become the human foundation of what would be called the "Church." In other words, to put it

simply, they are "us." And it's important to keep in mind that Christ wasn't losing some kind of bet here, but He chose these guys; He asserted His will. These were exactly the guys He wanted. They fit perfectly into His plans.

So, how did these guys work out? In a word, magnificently. Following Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension, these were the guys who spread the gospel with unflinching bravery. Peter went from denying any connection with Christ to becoming a prominent leader in the Jerusalem church. Historical, nonbiblical traditions tell us that Andrew preached in Greece, Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey) and Russia. Philip ministered in modern-day Ukraine, Bartholomew in Asia Minor and possibly as far east as India before ending up in Armenia. Matthew is reported to have ministered as far away as Ethiopia, Thomas also in India, and Simon the Zealot reportedly preached in modern-day Iran. All of them besides the apostle John reportedly died as martyrs for their faith.

But perhaps the greatest testimony to what they became was actually declared by their opponents, following their arrest of Peter and John for *proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead - Acts 4:2b*. Luke tells us in the book of Acts: *When [the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law] saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus - Acts 4:13*. What an incredible mark to leave on somebody - that they had been with Jesus!

APPLICATION

So now, 2,000 years later, what inspiration can we find for these that Christ selected? Actually, quite a bit!

While people often question the choices of why "such-and-such" was chosen for this or that role, the Scriptures make it very clear what is behind God's choices of the people through which He is going to accomplish His work - and it all comes down to what this world offered vs. what God offered:

- 1) *"[T]he wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish"- God speaking, Isaiah 29:14b.*
- 2) [So, because the wisdom and intelligence of the world will vanish] *"Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches, but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they have the understanding to know Me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight"- God speaking, Jeremiah 9:23-24.*

In the New Testament, the apostle Paul reflected that same perspective in his first letter to the Corinthian church: *God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before Him - Paul, I Corinthians 1:27-29.*

One reason Jesus chose these guys was that He saw in them guys who had nothing to boast about so, once they experienced the satisfying "fullness" of life in Christ, they would minister from the standpoint of Christ being everything for them. In other words, they were willing to embrace their helplessness in order to be seen in the strength that only Christ can provide. That would be their boast; to paraphrase Jesus from the Upper Room: *"[A] part from [Christ we] can do nothing" - Jesus Christ, John 15:5b*. There's nothing left to be proud about when everything has

been surrendered. And there's certainly nothing to brag about when there's not a single thing we can accomplish anyway. And from that foundation, their lives would reflect nothing to do with themselves but everything to do with Christ:

- 1) ***Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God - Paul, II Corinthians 3:5.***
- 2) ***[The Lord] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness. "Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. For when I am weak, then I am strong - Paul, II Corinthians 12:9, Job.***

It also meant that these were guys who would realize and embrace the fact that their only way of accomplishing anything in ministry would be by being supplied only by Christ's strengths and mercies:

- 1) ***I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me - Paul, Philippians 4:13 (NKJV).***
- 2) ***[M]y God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus - Paul, Philippians 4:19 (NKJV).***

Remember that, in Paul's own case, he had left Jerusalem on his way to Damascus with all kinds of arrogant threats, proudly riding at the head of an impressive procession. But then he met Christ who, in the brilliance of His light, literally knocked Paul right to the ground. An entrance into Damascus that was supposed to inspire fear and trembling instead was reduced to a guy stumbling in his blindness who needed help for every step he took.

Now, of course, people would surrender to Christ who had great riches and were highly educated, but they were willing to be shown how weak and poor and dumb and blind they were outside of Christ. Paul, for instance was a very educated guy, yet he too came with significant weaknesses, made clear to him by Christ, which he elaborated on as he continued in that same letter to the Corinthians: ***When I came to you, I did not come with eloquence or human wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. . . . I came to you in weakness with great fear and trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power - Paul, I Corinthians 2:1a-5.***

In fact, in his letter to Rome, he elaborated on more of his weaknesses - not of ability but of his own life in Christ: ***I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing. ... What a wretched man I am! - Paul, Romans 7:15, 18b-19, 24a.*** In other words, Paul realized, and even embraced, his weaknesses, leaving only Christ to be able to accomplish anything through him.

Another reason Christ chose the men He did was that they were incredibly relatable. We all have our weaknesses; we all have our flaws. We all struggle to one degree or another with what Christ is trying to teach us - just like them. So, wow- if he could use guys like that, maybe it's not such a crazy thought that He would, could use me, too.

Yet another reason for choosing these guys was that the chance of anybody being envious of these guys was unlikely, as was anybody being intimidated by who they were. They were nobody - absolute ordinary, regular guys living in a place within a religion that many in the world despised. They boasted no great achievements, no phenomenal riches, no stellar

education. At a human level, we would look at all these guys and give a great big collective yawn. Nothing to look at here.

And a final reason: Jesus chose these guys because they were all guys who had experienced failure, particularly, failure despite their very best efforts. Think about the number of facets of their lives over which they had no control: the fish, the lake, the weather, the markets, the Romans, the taxes. No matter how good, how diligent, how dedicated - they lived with a daily reality of uncertainty, of how quickly they came to the end of themselves.

But then they meet Jesus - and everything changes. They see His power over nature. They see His power over disease. They see His power over demons. They see the incredible difference between the power they have in their own strength and the power they can have in His strength. So, when He tells them, "*[A] part from Me you can do nothing*" - *Jesus Christ, John 15:5b*, they believe Him. They see that they can trust Him. He is the only certainty they have ever known. And they grow to realize that Jesus is the only certainty they will ever need. And that's the only way that verse works - to trust that the speaker of those words is not just a momentary great man but an eternally great God!

So, when He tells them: "*[D]o not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you*" - *Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:19-20*, they know they can trust Him on that. And when He tells them: "*[S]urely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*" - *Jesus Christ, Matthew 28:20b*, they know they can trust Him on that, too.

BOTTOM LINE: Jesus chose guys who became willing to be remade by Him, who became willing to be identified with Him - His ways, His thoughts, His will be done. Guys who were willing to give up everything they had for everything He offered. Nothing else would matter because nothing else would even come close.

CONCLUSION

So, 2,000 years later, here's the deal: I know that, for many of us, and I'm no different than anybody else, it's hard to hear that we're not smart enough or rich enough or strong enough. But that's exactly the place God wants us to be - the end of ourselves, the end of our strength, the end of our efforts, so that we realize the only "smarts" that matter is the wisdom God gives us, that the only riches that matter are the riches of glory in Christ Jesus, that the only strength that matters is the strength of God in us through the person of Jesus Christ.

That's why it is so important for us to consider: Which life matters to us. The life now or the life to come. The only reason God desires to give us His wisdom and His riches and His strength is for representing the life to come. Everything in this life is going to vanish. Look around; take inventory if you want, but it's all going to be gone. All that will be left is those things that translate into eternity. You won't find party or politics or issues or conflicts there. All that translates into eternity are those things done for the kingdom of God - preaching the gospel, representing the Savior, loving as Christ loved. That stuff will remain; that stuff will endure - forever.

Christ wants disciples who only want His life to shine. Whose life is shining in us? When people see us, do they respond as the religious leaders did to the disciples - taking note that we have been with Jesus? Is that the mark that we are leaving on our world? Let's pray!