

# Compassion on a Crowd

## The Life of Jesus Vol.1 (Tests and Builds) Part 14

### Mark 6:30-44 10-30-11

Summary: Jesus and the Twelve need rest from the crowds so they go to a secluded place (there is a need for rest and the way to find it is by seeking fellowship with God, not by exposing yourself to the spiritual warfare of TV or something similar). But Jesus canceled His day off (so be flexible - God leads by pointing one direction for a while then another). What changed Jesus' mind was compassion. Enjoy His compassion and imitate it (realizing the magnitude of God's wrath and that your ministry is the solution).

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**Mark 6:1-44** And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. **7** Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. **8** These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff--no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. **9** Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. **10** Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. **11** And if any place will not

welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." 12 They went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them. 14 King Herod heard about this, for Jesus' name had become well known. Some were saying, "John the Baptist has been raised from the dead, and that is why miraculous powers are at work in him." 15 Others said, "He is Elijah." And still others claimed, "He is a prophet, like one of the prophets of long ago." 16 But when Herod heard this, he said, "John, the man I beheaded, has been raised from the dead!" 17 For Herod himself had given orders to have John arrested...

27 So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John's head. The man went, beheaded John in the prison, 28 and brought back his head on a platter. He presented it to the girl, and she gave it to her mother. 29 On hearing of this, John's disciples came and took his body and laid it in a tomb. 30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. 31 Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." 32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. 35 By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. "This is a remote place," they said, "and it's already very late. 36 Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat." 37 But he answered, "You give them something to eat." They said to him, "That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?" 38 "How many loaves do you have?" he asked. "Go and see." When they found out, they said, "Five--and two fish." 39 Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. 40 So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. 41 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. 42 They all ate and were satisfied, 43 and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. 44 The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.

## The Need for Rest

### *Jesus sends out the Twelve*

We have been studying the miracles of Jesus, and we left off last time with the account of Jesus raising Jairus' daughter from the dead. Right after that Jesus sends the Disciples out on their first short-term mission trip. He told them to go and preach about the kingdom and when He did that He did something that really blew them away. He said, "You know how all this time you've been following Me I have been performing all these miracles and signs and wonders? Well, I'll tell you what – how about if I give you guys that power?"

**Mark 6:7 Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. ... 12 They went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.**

And Matthew adds that they also raised the dead. They could just decide to heal anyone they wanted – any sickness, any disease; they could cast out demons – they could even raise the dead!

Can you imagine that? Jesus sent them out in pairs of two. So you get your partner, and off you go. You arrive in some village, and you look at your partner and say, “OK, now what?” You are a fisherman – you have never done anything like this before. “Well, we’re supposed to preach about the kingdom, and He told us to do miracles.” You: “Ok, um ... you want to go first?” Your partner: “No, that’s alright – you can go.” You look around and you see an old beggar with only one arm. So you take a deep breath, and then, “Hey, everyone – gather ‘round. I want to show you all something.” And as they gather you’re thinking, “*What if this doesn’t work?*” And the more they gather the more you start to sweat. Finally you say, “You see this man at the gate every day – missing an arm. Well, um, my friend here is going to heal him.” Your partner scowls at you. Then he walks up to the man and says, “What’s your name.”

“Benjamin.”

“Oh. I see. Well ... um – be healed?”

And immediately the guy has two arms! And your partner almost falls over. The crowd is impressed, but not half as impressed as you and your partner!

And when you finally regain your composure a little bit, you turn to the crowd in boldness and say, “My friend is now going to preach to you about the kingdom of God.”

I don’t know if that is the way it happened, but we do know that they could do miracles at will. They did not have to pray and ask God to heal the person like we do. Jesus gave them the power and authority to just decide someone was going to be healed, and the person was healed (Acts 3:6).<sup>1</sup> The fact that they did those miracles is important because it validates them as legitimate spokesmen for God, which means we can be sure that what we read in the New Testament is indeed the very Word of God.<sup>2</sup>

### ***The need to talk with Jesus***

So Jesus sends these twelve ordinary guys out as Apostles, and gives them power to work all these miracles at will. Then by verse 30 they are all back.

### **30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.**

I bet! Can you imagine? We come home from a vacation or road trip and we want to tell our family or friends all about it. Can you imagine if on that trip you were casting out demons and healing every sick person you saw and raising the dead? You know these guys were just busting at the seams to talk to Jesus, and tell Him about what happened, and ask Him questions.

“We raised a dead person, but the people still wouldn’t believe – why is that?”

“The people kept asking us this question and we didn’t know how to answer. What would you say, Jesus?”

### ***The need for time alone***

And Jesus was no doubt eager to talk to them as well. What an amazing teaching opportunity. So both Jesus and the Apostles really want to talk, but they can’t.

### **31 so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat...**

It is relentless. By this point in Jesus’ ministry the crowds have gotten out of control.

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<sup>1</sup> We don’t know what it was like the first time, but by the time you get into the book of Acts they didn’t have the slightest hesitation. In Acts 3:6 Peter says to the man crippled from birth, “I don’t have money, but what I do have I give to you – get up and walk.” It was something they had and could give at will.

<sup>2</sup> See the Appendix for why the miracles of the Apostles are important for us.

And on top of that they get some horrible, crushing news. Some messengers come running up – maybe some of Jesus’ brothers, or cousins. They can tell right away something’s wrong.

“What is it?”

“It’s Your cousin, John the Baptist.”

“Is he OK?”

“He’s dead. Murdered.”

Now all the excited chatter about the mission trip gives way to shock and sadness – and questions. The forerunner announcing the arrival of the Messiah, executed in his early thirties? What is going on? What is happening to the messianic revolution? “Couldn’t You have protected him, Jesus?”

But they can’t even ask those questions because of this pressing, relentless crowd. And so Jesus finally says, “Enough. We’re taking a day off.”

**31 he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." 32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.**

### *There is a time for rest*

One thing we can learn from Jesus’ example is that rest is a good thing. God designed us to need rest. He could have created us so that your whole body worked like your heart. Your heart starts beating when you are in the womb and does not stop until you die. God could have easily made your whole body like that – no need for any breaks or rest. But instead, in His perfect wisdom, He designed us to constantly get tired, and need to rest. There are some important reasons why God wants us to rest.

Sometimes it is God’s will for you to take a nap..., or go on a vacation. Resting can be a spiritual thing to do. In Old Testament times, the holiest day of the week was the rest day (the Sabbath). In Matthew 11 Jesus described salvation as being like rest.

### *How to rest*

So one thing we learn from Jesus’ example is that rest is important. Another thing we learn is *how* to rest. When Jesus needed a break, what did He do to get recharged? He would always go off to an isolated place and seek God in prayer. That is an important example for us, because so often we get tired and want to recharge ourselves, and so we sit down in front of the TV, or we read some inane drivel in a magazine, watch a movie, or read the newspaper – or somehow expose ourselves to the world. That is not rest. Physically it may be, but spiritually it is warfare. You are not going to recharge yourself doing that. When you subject yourself to TV or movie or some other worldly pulpit, remember those things are designed by Satan to make God and His way seem less real and less attractive, and to see the world and sin as more attractive and desirable. It is possible to watch a TV show and avoid that effect if you have your spiritual armor on, and you have your guard up, and you are alert, and you work really hard to fight against those influences. But who in his right mind would do that for rest? No soldier says, “I’m exhausted. I think I’ll go up to the front lines for a little R&R.”

One reason so many Christians get burned out is because they go to the front lines for their rest! They are constantly refreshing their body but never their spirit, so they get burned out. Why is it so rare for us to say, “I am exhausted, I think I’ll take my Bible and go off by myself for an hour”? The only way to really rest and become rejuvenated is to do something to get away from the onslaught of temptation. Or get around some godly Christians whose conversation will lift your thinking to a heavenly perspective. It might require discipline to do that. It might not be physically restful. It might be mentally demanding – maybe you end up losing some sleep or leisure time. But you need it for spiritual rejuvenation. Go somewhere where you can shut the world out and play some good Christian music that draws your attention to spiritual things. Do not go to the world for rest; go to the Lord.

## Flexibility

OK, so Jesus decides to take a day off and get some rest in an isolated, solitary place away from people.

**32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. 33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.**

They make the little four-mile trip across the top end of the Sea of Galilee, and the people literally run around on land (about eight miles – thirteen kilometers). This is how out-of-control the crowds were. This is the first Galilean 13K. Can you imagine if we had a guest speaker one day and after he finished preaching here he went down to speak again in Mile High Stadium, and you were so enthralled with him that you *ran* from here all the way down to Mile High to see him? That is eight miles. That gives you some idea of the enthusiasm of the crowds at this point.

So when Jesus and the Twelve arrive at this deserted, uninhabited, solitary haven of rest that was to be a retreat from the crowds, the first thing they see as they get close to shore is a massive, needy, clamoring mob of people.

**34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd...**

He said, “Sorry folks – we’re closed. Check back on Monday.” No, that is not what happened. What happened was Jesus cancelled His day off and spent that day in what was probably one of the most difficult and taxing days of ministry He and the Twelve had ever had.

That is fascinating to me, because Jesus always did the Father’s will. Earlier He had decided it was God’s will for Him to take the day off; now He decides it’s God’s will for Him to spend the day ministering to this crowd. Did He make a mistake the first time? No. Earlier in the day it was God’s will for Jesus to *attempt* to take the day off, but now God is guiding Jesus to work that day. This is very often the way God guides us. He makes everything point toward a certain destination, so that we will get moving in that direction, but then half-way there He shows us some other things to make us realize He wants us to go a different direction. For example, suppose God’s will for you to go to college for two semesters and then take a particular job. How does He get you to take that track? Does He tell you ahead of time the entire plan? No. He just allows all indicators to point toward the conclusion that He is leading you to get a Master’s degree. Then one year into the program He brings the job opportunity along and lets all the indications point toward dropping out of school and taking that job as the wisest course. God does not show us all the left and right turns in His plan for us ahead of time. He just shows us the next step. And in this case He wanted Jesus and the Twelve to start to take a day off, cross the lake, and then cancel that day off.

Flexibility is a very important thing in ministry. If you are the type who is inflexible and cannot ever handle any change of plans, think about this: Jesus Christ had flawless wisdom, and He changed course; what does that say about how flexible we should be with our very limited, very fallible wisdom?

## Compassion

So Jesus changes course. But how did He know to change course? How did He know that it was not the Father’s desire for Him to turn the boat around and get away from this crowd? Did He get a prompting? No. Look what the text says.

**34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.**

What changed Jesus' mind was an emotional response of compassion. And this is the verse I would like to spend the rest of our time on this morning. The thing that moved Jesus to change course and cancel His much-needed day off was compassion.

### ***Compassion as motivation***

The word translated **compassion** comes from the noun *splagna* which refers to the inside of the stomach. You know how when you see someone who is in agonizing pain and you feel so sorry for him that you actually, physically feel pain in your stomach? That is what this word refers to. Jesus saw this crowd - saw their spiritual condition, and He felt pain in His stomach.

That happened frequently to Jesus. It happened with this crowd here in Mark 6. It happened with another crowd in Mark 8. He was moved with compassion for the leper in Mark 1, and the two blind men in Matthew 20, and the widow in Luke 7. This is what Jesus was like. Why? Because that is the way God is

Many people imagine God to be an uncaring ogre – indifferent to human struggle. He does not really care about my little hardships. But if you read the Bible at all you know that God is compassionate. He feels pain – emotional pain when He sees you suffer. Think of how often Scripture emphasizes the compassion of God. When God revealed Himself to Moses, He said, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God...” And that description of God is repeated over and over and over throughout the Old Testament. God wants us to understand that He is compassionate. God cares. God loves. He is moved and touched by our weaknesses. His compassion and mercy are as high as the heavens and as massive as the great deep. And so if you put God in a body, and let Him love like that and care like that, it will rack that human body.

Jesus was frequently moved with physical pain at the trouble of others. And in this instance, that is what made Him decide to cancel His day off. It was emotion that moved Him to decide He would rather minister to a needy crowd all day when He is dead tired, than get some rest. Compassion is so important because it gives a sense of urgency to ministry. Compassion will get you moving when self-discipline is not enough.

### ***Spiritual calamity***

And what is really important for us to see here is what elicited this incredible compassion. Usually you do not feel compassion in your stomach unless someone is bleeding, or really suffering some intense pain. Think back to the last time you felt such extreme compassion for someone that you actually felt it in your stomach. It does not really happen all that often. More often for some than others. But let me ask you this – when was the last time you felt that – physically felt pain in your stomach out of compassion for someone who was not suffering? They had some other trouble that did not involve any physical pain, and still you had so much compassion that you felt it in your stomach. That is pretty rare. And yet it is exactly what we see in this passage. Jesus has that kind of compassion on a crowd of people who were not suffering, but they had a problem that they were not even aware of.

### **34 he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.**

A lot of those people were sick and in need of healing, a lot of them were very poor and in desperate straits financially, a lot of them were no doubt in hard, painful, abusing marriages. But none of that is the main thing that gripped Jesus' emotions. What wrenched His midsection with pain was not their temporal hardships, but rather their spiritual lostness. If one person is lying in a ditch with broken ribs and wounds that are bleeding out, and another person is sitting comfortably in a \$500,000 house watching TV and being led astray by someone like Joel Osteen or TD Jakes, it is that second person whose situation is so dire that it should wrench us in our midsection with the pains of compassion. If you know the Lord and your sins are forgiven then dying in a ditch is no big deal. But

for someone to think he is saved because of some false teacher, and to sail along in a comfortable life and then die and go to hell forever – that should move us deeply. This is what should drive us to missions – lost sheep without a shepherd.

## Enjoy Christ's Compassion

I have two main goals for this sermon. One is that we see Jesus' compassion and marvel at it and take delight in it. The second is that we see it as so beautiful that we imitate it.

Let's talk about enjoying His compassion first. The compassion of Christ is an amazing thing, and learning how to enjoy it is a crucial part of living the Christian life. There are so many problems people have that are caused by a failure to understand Christ's compassion. Failing to understand God's compassion causes crippling worry. It causes fear, it causes anger, it causes stress, it causes anxiety. It is amazing how many counseling problems we deal with that are solved by talking to the person about God's compassion. A lot of people tend to think about God's promises mainly as contractual obligations. He promises to save those who believe, and promises to guide you through life, promises to provide all that you need to do His will, promises rest, comfort, wisdom, joy – all kinds of wonderful things. And there are Christians who know all that, but they still worry and fret and get upset and doubt and everything else. And it is because they think of God fulfilling those promises as a contractual obligation, rather than out of compassion. If you are contractually obligated to provide something for someone, you might get annoyed with that person and grudgingly follow through on your obligation. But if your heart is warm toward the person, and you feel deep compassion for the person, and your heart is swelling with love for the person, then you fulfill your obligation in a different way. If you are legally obligated to some business associate, you might do the bare minimum. But if it is your own little daughter, and she is in danger, your heart is moved to act in all kinds of ways above and beyond whatever promises you have made. And probably the main reason parenthood exists is to teach us about the way God is toward His people. Scripture is constantly drawing that comparison. Jesus says, "If your son asks you for bread, will you give him a stone? And if you who are evil know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven?"

**Psalm 103:13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.**

### *He welcomed them*

I have heard people preach this passage and they make it sound like Jesus was acting only out of duty. He gets to the other side and sees the huge crowd on the day He wanted to rest and says, "Oh, no. Oh well, I guess we don't get our day off." That was not Jesus' response.

### **Luke 9:11 He welcomed them and spoke to them**

The term, **welcomed** (*apodekomai*) is a strengthened form of the word for "welcome." Colin Brown points out that there are a lot of forms of this word (several prefixes), this one "strengthens the positive significance of the simple verb in the sense of welcoming, approving, agreeing, valuing." What it is saying is that Jesus, with heartfelt sincerity, welcomed and accepted and received them in a wholehearted way. That same word is used in Acts 2:41 to describe the way a true believer welcomes the gospel. It refers to a warm, enthusiastic, welcoming – receiving someone into your presence with gladness.

Jesus did not minister to this crowd in a reluctant, grudging way. Nor does He fulfill His promises to you out of some kind of burdensome obligation. And it is so important to understand that. There are people who continually doubt their salvation. That is a good thing if you have no fruit or evidence of salvation. But I am talking about people who love the Lord – they believe the gospel, they hate their

sin, nothing is more important to them than the Lord Jesus Christ, their desire is to follow wherever He leads no matter what the cost, they have fruit in their lives – genuine believers; and yet they doubt their salvation. Why? Because they imagine a god who would make it impossible to know if you are saved for sure. They imagine a compassionless god.

There are people who fully expect God to punish them and deal harshly with them for things they did wrong in ignorance, while trying to obey Him. And when I ask them, “Would you do that to your kids? Would you deal harshly with them if they were trying their hardest to please you but just didn’t know that a certain thing was wrong? Would you give them guidance in a form that is impossible for them to understand? Would you take what they need the most and place it out of their reach, and then punish them for not being able to reach it?” We would not dream of doing those things to our children, and yet so many Christians assume that is the way God deals with them. And in most cases I think it is because they picture God following through on promises as contractual obligations rather than as expressions of deep and tender emotional compassion.

It is very important that we as believers learn to enjoy God’s compassion. When you are hurt in some way, and no one feels sorry for you – God knows what you are feeling, and He feels the pain of compassion. Sometimes there are things that are so hard, but no one else would understand. You wake up in the morning with zero motivation, and it is all you can do just to get out of bed. But no one feels sorry for you because you had to get up out of bed. In fact, they look down on you because you struggle. But God knows how hard it is for you, and He feels for you. God has compassion when He sees your struggle against sin, when He sees the pain and anguish in your heart, when something is difficult for you, when you get left out, or made fun of, or overlooked, or mistreated, or neglected. He even has compassion when He knows some of some trouble you are in that you are not even aware of.

## **Imitate Christ’s Compassion**

Let all your experiences of hardship serve as memory cues to set your mind thinking about His compassion so you can learn to enjoy the compassion of Christ. And the more you enjoy it, the more you will see it as beautiful and prize it in your heart, and that will enable you to imitate it. God is pleased when we imitate His compassion. In fact, He built it into our very bodies.

### ***God programmed our bodies to reflect His compassion***

I once asked a doctor why we feel pain in the midsection when we see someone who is in trouble. He explained that the emotion of compassion actually causes your body to secrete acids that irritate the lining of your intestines. Our bodies have built into them a mechanism to inflict pain on ourselves just because someone else is suffering.

I would love to hear an evolutionist try to explain that one. How could that ever evolve? If it is survival of the fittest, it seems to me the people who got a mutation that caused them to feel sorry for others would be the first to die out in the struggle for survival. If two cavemen were fighting over some food, and the stronger one, each time he got the upper hand, started feeling sorry for his opponent, how does that help him survive? If the Titanic is sinking, Darwin would have the strongest ones survive. But love and pity and compassion could drive the strongest man on the ship to give his life jacket to a helpless, weak individual. That does not fit evolutionary theory at all. But it makes perfect sense if our bodies were designed by a compassionate Creator who arranged our physiology to express His great heart of compassion. His craftsmanship in our bodies is obvious – He even left the thumbprint of His love on the lining of our internal organs and acids! Clearly it is God’s desire and purpose that we imitate His compassion.

### ***How to increase your compassion and use it to fight laziness***

So how do we imitate His compassion? We feel for someone who is suffering excruciating pain, but what about this kind of compassion? Compassion on a crowd of people? Compassion on people



who are not suffering any pain? And most importantly, how can we become like Christ so that our compassion for those who are in trouble drives us to work hard in ministry? We all struggle against laziness – how can we use compassion to help us win the war against the laziness of the flesh?

### ***Don't air condition hell***

For many people, step one is to stop trying to air condition hell. The wrath of God being poured out for eternity in hell seems so severe that we think we are being compassionate by coming up with doctrines that soften hell. Or we eliminate it altogether – so that God's wrath is just momentary and then unbelievers go out of existence and it is all over. So we soft pedal God's wrath, soften up Judgment Day, or paint a picture of God that involves absolutely nothing to be afraid of. We turn Him into a big Santa Claus who would not harm a flea. We talk only about His love and never about His anger, and over time we lose the urgency of winning the lost and helping the saints in the war against sin. If you are not afraid of God's wrath then you are not going to have compassion for those who are going to face God's wrath.

### **2 Corinthians 5:11 Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men.**

Why did Paul work so hard to persuade men to become Christians? What enabled him to suffer so much, and to work so hard in ministry? It was because Paul was so petrified of God's wrath, that it moved his heart with compassion for those who actually had to face it. We soften God's judgment so severely that we torpedo our own compassion. Your compassion is limited by your understanding of hell. Your compassion will never rise any higher than your conception of God's wrath.

### ***Realize the remedy***

So step one is to increase your understanding of God's wrath. And step two is something I think very few Christians understand very well. No matter how much you understand God's wrath, that still will not motivate you to work hard in ministry until you understand the remedy to spiritual disaster, and the role your ministry plays in that remedy. When Jesus saw this crowd, and He saw their spiritual plight – sheep without a shepherd – He knew He was what they needed. His compassion moved Him to cancel His day off because He had what they needed.

But what about us? Jesus and the Apostles could heal and do miracles and raise the dead, but what can I do? Of course Jesus' compassion would make Him cancel a day off, because He had exactly what the people needed. But what about us?

The people around you who are lost, or the Christians around you who are battling against sin or discouragement or depression or whatever else – what do those people need? They need the same thing those people back then – Jesus. But what so many Christians fail to understand is the fact that the Church IS Jesus' ... body. We are the body of Christ. So if someone needs grace from Jesus Christ – whether that person is saved or lost – if what they need is grace from Jesus, then what they need is the ministry of the Church. And for the Church to successfully do its work, you need to be doing your part. The reason the Holy Spirit gave you the gifts and abilities He gave you is so that you would carry out your crucial function in the body. And every body part in the body of Christ is crucial. There are no spiritual tonsils. No one can ever say to the body, "You have no need of me." If you are not functioning in ministry in the Church then the body of Christ is crippled to some degree, and that will inhibit the flow of grace to the people who need grace.

Do not ever downplay the importance of your calling in the Church. It does not matter if your calling is preaching sermons or sweeping floors – whatever you do that contributes to the success of the body of Christ will result in people receiving grace from the Lord Jesus Christ. You can do far greater things than heal and raise the dead. What good is raising the dead? Make someone have to die a second time? What good is that? That was useful for validating Jesus as God and the Apostles and His messengers, but now that all that is verified, what good would it do? What people need is to avoid

the wrath of God. Unbelievers need salvation, and believers need grace to fight against sin. And both of those happen mainly through the ministry of the Church. When you have a clear understanding of God's wrath, and you have a clear understanding that the remedy is through the ministry of the Church, you will be moved to get serious about your role in that. Keep that in mind next Sunday when we have our ministry fair. Before you go around to the tables, remind yourself how much spiritual trouble people are in, and how important it is that the church be strong and healthy and that every part in the body be firing on all cylinders.

### ***What breaks your heart? (Clue to your calling)***

And if you are struggling to discover what your calling is, one thing that can really help is to think through what things tend to generate compassion in your heart. What breaks your heart the most in the Church when it is not done well? If you are heartbroken when you see church after church of starving sheep, maybe your calling is in the area of teaching. If you are heartbroken when you see bruised, battered people who just get kicked around and pushed to the side, maybe your calling is in the area of mercy. People with the gift of giving are heartbroken when they see the church flounder and sputter along because of a lack of resources. A great way to discover your calling is by asking yourself, "What bothers me the most when it is not done well in the church?"

The great thing about knowing your calling and knowing your spiritual gift is this: When you are called to something and gifted for that thing, you understand more than anyone else how wonderful that thing is. A teacher knows more than anyone how valuable and important good teaching is. Someone with the gift of mercy understands more than anyone how important mercy is. And when you see people in need of that ministry, but being deprived of it, your heart genuinely goes out to those people in real compassion, and you find yourself not having any trouble at all being motivated to carry out your ministry. You have all the motivation you need and then some.

It is not necessarily egotistical if you want large numbers of people to benefit from your ministry. That can be ego, but it can also be compassion. If the Holy Spirit gives you something of incalculable worth, why would you want to limit it to just a few people who get that priceless gift? I can understand that if you think your ministry is coming from you. But if you realize your gift comes from the Holy Spirit, if you care about people at all you will want them to receive the invaluable treasure of your gift. And it will break your heart when they are deprived of it. It is a bad thing when churches get caught up with wanting more and more people just for the sake of pride in numbers. That is a huge problem in our day. But it is also a bad thing when people do not care at all about numbers. If you do not have a strong desire to see good churches get larger and larger, then you probably have a low view of the importance of the ministry of the Church. Or you have a low view of God's wrath and you do not understand how much trouble people are in.

Moses was a shepherd, and so his greatest heartache was the thought of what would happen to the sheep when he died. And Jesus is the ultimate Shepherd of the sheep, so to climb out of the boat and look over a vast multitude of sheep without a shepherd just fractured His heart to the point where His much-needed day off was out the window.

### **Mark 6:34 ...So he began teaching them many things.**

Jesus wanted to spend some time alone in seclusion, and that is a good thing. It is good for you to want to be alone with God. But we must never seek the fellowship of God in order to avoid ministry to men. True fellowship with God drives you to serve men, because the closer you are to God, the more your heart will beat with His great heart of compassion.

On the other hand, we should also note that while Jesus did not look at the crowd as an intrusion, and even though He was tired He gave His whole day to them, He did not give them what they wanted. Instead He taught them. I am sure they were all there for various reasons. But whatever it was they wanted, what they got was a sermon. In ministry people will make a lot of demands on you.

Sometimes they will try to make you feel guilty for not catering to their every desire. But if you are not doing something that ministers the Word of God to the hearts of people, or something that facilitates that; then you are not really giving them anything. Just learn their need for that, and love people, and compassion will do the rest.

## **Conclusion: Freely give**

When Jesus sent out the Twelve, He told them,

**Matthew 10:8 Freely you have received, freely give.**

This is why not one person in this room is at liberty to hold back on ministry. Whatever abilities God has given you – if you have two arms and two legs, if you can read, or talk or listen – if you can encourage or comfort or motivate or explain things – if you are good at reading people or a good listener or you can write or build things or fix things or clean things – whatever abilities you have - how much did that cost you? How much did the Holy Spirit charge you for those gifts? Nothing. Freely you have received; freely give.

And if you find you lack motivation, realize that what people need is grace from Jesus that will come when His body is firing on all cylinders, which requires you to do your part. And if the need does not seem all that urgent to you, study the magnitude of the wrath of God and the calamity of sin. And if all that still does not draw motivating, compelling compassion out of your heart, then redouble your efforts to enjoy the compassion of Christ on a daily, hourly basis until His compassion is so delightful and desirable in your sight that you are moved to imitate it.

**Benediction: Philippians 2:1-4 If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, 2 then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.**

# Appendix

## *The importance of the Apostles' Miracles*

And it is important for us to take note of their ability to do miracles, because that has a lot of significance for our lives. Here's why:

### *Royal Apostles*

Look at how Mark refers to the Twelve down in verse 30. They are called Apostles. The parallel passage in Mark 3:14-15 says, **He appointed twelve-designating them apostles.** We are used to them being called Apostles, but that was a surprising and dramatic term for Jesus to use because rabbis did not have apostles. They had disciples, not apostles. Kings had apostles. A disciple is a learner, or student. An apostle was someone commissioned with a task and vested with the same authority as the king who commissioned him. The terminology here has a royal ring to it.

### *New Israel*

Not only that, but there is great significance in the number twelve. Israel was comprised of twelve tribes - the descendants of the twelve patriarchs. When Jesus selected not ten, not twenty, but twelve Apostles what He was doing was creating a new people of God. Now the people of God will no longer be the physical descendants of the twelve patriarchs, but rather the spiritual descendants of the twelve Apostles. Whoever believes their gospel that they preached is a child of God, and the proof of that is the fact that they did the miracles. The reason their miracles are so important is everything we believe – the things we base our eternal destiny on – come to us from the Apostles. So it is critically important that they be validated as spokesmen for God.

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**Luke 6:12-16** One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. **13** When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: **14** Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, **15** Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, **16** Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

## Introduction

If you ever want some interesting reading, find a large church that is looking to hire a pastor, and send away for the job description and the list of required qualifications. It is unbelievable. You practically have to be able to walk on water. They want a stand-out resume, a proven track record, Masters degrees, Doctorate degrees, published author, well-known, young and healthy and good-looking, but with decades of experience and distinguished and mature and wise. We are determined to only use the highly qualified. If you have ever run a business, you know how important it is to have qualified people. Otherwise your business goes in the tank, because you do not have enough time or energy or ability to do everything yourself.

Can you imagine if you were in charge of hiring a team of men who would be the leaders, not of a local church, but of the Church worldwide? And part of their job description would be to write the Bible? Can you imagine what kind of list of qualifications we would come up with for that?

When Jesus stood on a hillside one day, looked over all his many followers, and proceeded to pick out twelve to be Apostles, that was what He was doing. He was selecting twelve men to fill the twelve most important job positions that have ever existed in the history of the human race. So it is no surprise that before Jesus picked out these men, He spent the entire night in prayer (Lk. 6:12).

We have been studying the works of Jesus, and the next main event is when Jesus sends out the twelve on their first, short-term mission project. And what I would like to do this morning is not just focus on this particular calling, but to back up and look at their calling in general. These twelve men are the greatest success story ever. At the beginning of Acts there are a few Christians huddled together in a room. Now two thousand years later, there are millions of Christians all around the world devoting our lives to following every word these men wrote. Skip ahead to Revelation and you see a vast multitude that no one could count from every tribe and tongue standing before the throne of God worshipping Him - all through the ministry of these twelve men. Jesus did a great job picking these guys. Spending the entire night in prayer really paid off in this case.

So what kind of men were they? What type of person does God tend to use when He wants to accomplish really great things? Let's just take a quick tour through the gospel accounts and see what we can glean about the kinds of skills and abilities these men had.

## Peter

### **Matthew 10:2 These are the names of the twelve apostles: first, Simon (who is called Peter)**

The word first means "chief," or "foremost." He was the leader. He was not called first, but he is always listed first. Peter spoke for the group, he represented the group, he asked questions for the group - he was even rebuked for the group. He was the leader.

What kind of a person was he? One word: *impetuous*. Act first, think later. He was the Apostle with the foot-shaped mouth. Ever met someone who as soon as a thought crosses his mind it comes out his mouth? That was Peter. Whenever Jesus asks a question, Peter blurts out an answer - even when he did not know the right answer. He had an answer for everything - even rhetorical questions. "Who touched Me?"

"Lots of people. That guy, they did, that guy..."

He always pipes up with an answer. All the followers leave Jesus - "Will you leave, too?" Peter: "Where would we go - You're the one with the words of eternal life."

"Who do you say I am?"

"Christ, Son of the living God"

He has always got an answer.

## ***Strengths and weaknesses***

Act first, think later is a personality trait that can really hurt people..., and it is a trait that can do great things for the glory of God. If you are the type who speaks without racking your brain to figure out what everyone will think, that gives you a great advantage in the battle against fear of man. Some people can never speak up when they should because they are paralyzed by fear of what people will think. Not you. You might be concerned about people looking down on you for your words, but only after you have already spoken the words. People like Peter are free to act on their faith, because by the time it occurs to them to have doubts, they have already acted. In the middle of a raging storm, Peter walked on water. “But he doubted and sank.” Yes, but there were eleven other guys who never got out of the boat. Why? Because they all thought it through first. People like Peter are half-way across the Sea of Galilee on foot before it occurs to them to think, “Wait a second, what if this doesn’t work?”

Isn’t it true that most of the time your strengths and weaknesses come from the same personality traits. What was Peter’s greatest strength? Fearless initiative. What was his greatest weakness? Fearless initiative. God gives you all kinds of strengths, and Satan uses those to push you into sin. So if you want to know your weaknesses, look real close to your strengths. And if you want to know your strengths, look right next to your weaknesses.

Sometimes Peter’s impulsiveness was a beautiful thing. In John 21, after the crucifixion, the Disciples go back to fishing, and they are working an area about one hundred yards off the shore, and suddenly there is a guy on the beach calling to them. They cannot really make out who it is from that distance, but John ends up recognizing His voice and says, “It’s the Lord.” SPLASH! Peter? Peter? Peter is swimming. He loved Jesus so much, he just had to be near Him – NOW. What about the fish? What about the boat? The crew? I am sure Peter thought about all that – later. But as soon as he sees an opportunity to be near Christ, he acts. No one desired nearness to Jesus more than Peter. You read the gospels and you get the feeling that every time Jesus stopped, Peter bumped into the back of Him. Peter was also a man of questions. He did not just answer them – he also asked them – lots of them. Peter asks more questions in the gospel accounts than all the rest of the Apostles combined. He does not care about looking dumb. If there is a question in his mind, it is coming out of his mouth.

“How many times do we have to forgive - up to seven times?”

“We left everything for You, what will our reward be?”

“Hey, why is that fig tree You cursed dead?”

“Explain the parable to us.”

“When are all these end times events going to happen?”

“Who do these parables apply to?”

**John 13:33 “I will be with you only a little longer...”**

**36 “Lord, where are you going?”**

**...“Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow’ later.”**

**37 Peter asked, “Lord, why can’t I follow you now?”**

And after Peter was told he would die as a martyr, he said, “Well, what about John?”

This group of men was the most important group of men in the world with the most difficult task in the world, and what was their leader like? Ambivalent, inconsistent, impetuous, questioning – he argues with the Lord, he rebukes the Lord. Peter was a man with a long list of mostly bad personality characteristics, yet these are the very things Jesus used to make him great. Except for Jesus, no name appears more often in the Gospels than Peter’s.

## Andrew

The second name in the list is Andrew – Simon Peter’s brother. These guys were quite a pair. Andrew found Jesus first, Andrew was called first, but Peter gets all the attention. The first three called were Andrew, James and John. Who were the inner three? Peter, James, and John. Andrew got pushed out.

Andrew was no Peter, that is for sure. But he really was a great man – in a different way. He was not out there walking on the water, but he brings a little boy to Jesus with some loaves and fishes. In fact, that seems to be the mark of Andrew’s life. Every time we see him he is bringing someone to Jesus. The boy with his lunch at the feeding of the five thousand. The Greeks in John 12. (Philip’s way of bringing people to Jesus was to bring them to Andrew, and Andrew would bring them to Jesus.) Andrew as the one who first brought Peter to Jesus. Sometimes it takes an Andrew to reach a Peter.

And when he does, he is right back in Peter’s shadow. Of the thirteen times Andrew is mentioned in Scripture, with only one exception his name always appears with Peter’s – even when Peter is not part of the story. He is always, “Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother.” It is like that is his last name. All his life - “Andrew? Who’s Andrew?”

“Peter’s brother.”

“Oh – OK. - Yeah, Peter, he’s really something isn’t he?”

When Andrew was the first to find the Messiah, you might expect he would say, “I’m not telling Peter!” No, the very first thing he does is run and tell his brother, knowing full well that as soon as Peter enters the group, Peter will run the group, and Andrew would be right back in the shadows. But that is Andrew. He is content to serve quietly. He does not want to be on stage, he does not want to be out in front, he does not want any attention. You never hear about these people. They are just quietly working behind the scenes.

## James and John

The next two are also brothers – James and John. The most direct statement about these brothers’ temperament is Mark. 3:17 where Jesus nicknamed them, “Sons of Thunder.” They were hot-headed fireballs. Jesus passed through a Samaritan village that did not welcome Him.

**Luke 9:54 When the disciples James and John saw’ this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?”**

Great missionary heart. They don’t accept you? Fry ‘em.

I think their favorite moment in Jesus’ life was when He made a whip to clear the Temple.

“Get ‘em! Let them have it Lord!”

When Herod wanted to stop the Church’s progress, he chopped off James’ head. He put Peter in jail. Apparently James was perceived as a bigger problem than Peter. James was aggressive. He was the first of the Apostles to be martyred. Fourteen years into the book of Acts and he is dead. The world could not deal with James.

And his brother John – we picture this mild, pale, skinny little guy laying his head on Jesus’ shoulder talking about love all day. But John was just as thunderous as James. The one time John appears by himself, he gets rebuked by Jesus for not accepting an outsider (Mk. 9:38-41). John was an explosive, short-tempered, aggressive, insensitive, thunderous man whose evangelistic motto was “Turn or burn...on second thought, just burn.” No love at all.

And it is fascinating to see how the Lord used these two brothers. The Lord changed John. John became the Apostle of love. The word “love” appears twenty-four times just in the tiny book of 1 John. John became consumed with the importance of love.

And he loved Jesus. John was closer to Jesus than anyone else. He is called the Apostle whom Jesus loved. And when it came time to pass on the duties when Jesus was dying, to Peter He said,

“Feed My sheep,” but to John He said, “Take care of My mother.” No one was closer to Jesus than John – they were best friends.

The fascinating thing about James and John is the different ways the Lord used them. God used John by *changing* his characteristics, and he used James by *channeling* them. Fourteen years and James is dead. John lived about sixty-five years after the crucifixion, which means he was probably a teenager when Jesus chose him. Interesting that He is in His thirties and picked a teenager for a best friend (and a wild teenager at that). John was probably the youngest in the group, and very likely lived to be the oldest. When he was an old man, God still was not done with him. At the end of his life, when he was very elderly and close to death, he jotted down a little booklet you may have heard of – the book of Revelation. John – he ended up writing more of the New Testament than any of the twelve.

### ***Pride***

Jesus had to do a lot of work on these two brothers. At the beginning they had massive egos. There was one time when James and John came to Jesus with their mother, and asked to be on His right and left in the kingdom. All they want is to be the top two men in the Universe.

**Matthew 20:22 “You don’t know what you are asking,” Jesus said to them. “Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?” “We can,” they answered.**

We can handle anything You can handle. Such pride. Jesus was trying to explain to them that in the kingdom the way to glory is the way of the cross. It is the way of humility, servanthood, and suffering. So when they ask for the greatest seats in the kingdom, they are asking for the greatest suffering. So He says, “Can you drink from My cup?” and they say, “Sure. Piece of cake.”

### **23 Jesus said to them, “You will indeed drink from my cup”**

Both these men did drink the cup of Jesus’ suffering. James was the first of the Apostles to die, John was the last. James got his head chopped off right away; John was exiled and served the Lord under persecution for decade after decade.

The Romans had a coin that pictured an ox standing before an altar and a plow, and the inscription said, “Ready for either.” That is how it is for the Christian. For James, it was the altar (immediate, dramatic sacrifice of his life in dying for the Lord). For John, it was the long, difficult furrow of the plow (decade after decade of hard service). There is more than one way to give your life for God.

What kind of people does God tend to use? He uses quiet people like Andrew, and He uses loud ones like James and John. And some of them He uses by changing their characteristics; others He uses by channeling them. The Lord uses those who with tenacity advance the front lines of the Kingdom, who see only a job and will die getting it done. And He uses men like John, who are sensitive and loving, and who show men the love of God and attract men to Christ. He uses people when they are crazy, energetic teenagers – full of zeal and tireless – but lacking in life experience, and he uses people when they are old, tired, secluded on an island - forgotten by most people, but still important in the kingdom of God.

## **Philip**

And then He uses people like Philip. You get a great picture of Philip’s personality in John 6, at the feeding of the five thousand, where Jesus singles Philip out. Just before Andrew shows up with that little boy, Jesus wants to teach Philip a lesson.



**John 6:5** When Jesus looked up and saw a great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" **6** He asked this only to test him, for he already had in mind what he was going to do. **7** Philip answered him, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!"

Philip already had it all calculated. They had these barley biscuits that were about the size of your hand and an inch thick. You could get thirty-six of those biscuits for one denarius. Eight months' wages is two hundred denarii. So Philip sees this crowd, and he whips out a pen and paper: "Let's see, we could get thirty-six of those times two hundred, that's 7200 biscuits. Five thousand men plus wives and children, 15,000-20,000 people. If each person took a bite around the edge..."

"Listen, I got it all figured out - it can't be done."

Jesus had been performing miracles of healing all day long and it does not even occur to Philip to rely on that.

Philip is analytical and pragmatic – a man of common sense and calculation. He cannot see past the natural. He is limited by measurements and calculation.

Men like this cannot deal with anything out of the ordinary. When those Greeks came to see Jesus, he did not know what to do! They were Greeks. This has not happened before – it is different.

"You guys wait here, I don't know if this can happen. I'm going to have to get this authorized. I'm going to have to check with Andrew."

He was afraid of anything out of the ordinary.

Every church board has people like this. There is an opportunity for people to come to Christ, and they are sitting there in the board meeting saying, "It can't be done." The power of the Holy Spirit does not even register in their calculations.

**John 12:22** Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

This is the second time Andrew bails him out. It is great to have an Andrew around when you are dealing with a Philip. You get Philip together with Peter or James and all you get is a big argument.

"I'm not taking the Greeks to those guys – those maniacs will bring *anyone* to Jesus without even thinking about the ramifications. I'd better ask Andrew."

But a quiet, humble Andrew can come along and give Philip's faith a little, quiet boost without being too threatening.

"That feels a little funny bringing Gentiles in, doesn't it, Philip? It's OK though, because the Lord came to save everyone..." (and he holds Philip's hand in bringing these men to the Lord).

One last glimpse of Philip. The night before Jesus died, and Philip is still confused about Jesus' deity.

**John 14:8** Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time?

This is after three years of intensive training by Jesus Himself! It is like someone completing seminary and as he goes up and the guy hands him his diploma, he leans over and says, "Remind me one more time - who is Jesus again? Is He God or what?" Philip was not the sharpest knife in the drawer. Oh, and by the way – God made Philip one of the twelve most important men who ever lived.

## Nathaniel

Philip had a friend named Bartholomew. That was his last name – his first name was Nathaniel. Nathaniel was the opposite of Philip. He believed and understood everything right from day one. When he first met Jesus, Jesus said, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." He knew what kind of tree Nathaniel had been sitting under. One little act of power, and Nate says, "You are the

Messiah,” and from that moment on it is settled. After that, Nathaniel never has another question. He believes, he understands, he trusts – it is all settled for him.

Nathaniel was not perfect. He had a terrible attitude toward Nazareth. He is the one who said, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” So he had some prejudice. But as soon as he met Jesus and Jesus revealed Himself, he believed.

What kind of people does God use? God uses slow, dull, weak-faithed skeptics like Philip, and clear thinking, trusting great-faithed souls like Nathaniel.

## **Matthew**

Next comes Matthew, the tax collector. He is the only one in the list where it mentions his former job. Tax collectors were the most hated individuals in the whole culture. They were the worst kind of traitor, because they were Jews who collected taxes for Rome from fellow Jews - and ripped them off in the process. They are always mentioned in Scripture with sinners and prostitutes; because that is the crowd they hung around. And that is the kind of people they were. Before Jesus called him, Matthew would have been in the worst kind of bars in the worst part of town. Probably a very non-religious person. Certainly no Bible expert. Tax collectors were banned from the synagogues, so Matthew probably knew next to nothing about the Bible.

Matthew was one of those people who had just ruined his life. Once you have been a tax collector, no one would ever hire you, so there is no way out of that job. He is just one of those hopeless cases of human debris that is no value to anyone. But Jesus calls him, and he follows. And all the way through the gospels he never says a word. He never asks a question, never appears in an event. He is not a character in any of the miracles accounts. After his calling he is never mentioned again as doing or saying anything.

Although he did make one little contribution. You are holding it in your hand. Matthew was used by God to pen the greatest work on the majesty of the kingliness of Christ ever written – the Gospel of Matthew. And it is interesting – Matthew quotes Old Testament more than all the other three gospel writers combined. He started out with zero knowledge and ended up becoming an expert on the Old Testament.

Who does God use? He uses people like Nathaniel - people who before coming to know Him were pious, sincere, God-fearing men who are seeking God, seeking his will, searching the Scriptures. Honest men in whom there is no guile - nothing false, no deceit. And he uses guys like Matthew - irreligious low-life traitorous crooks who could not care less about people or God, who are steeped in overt sin, and who have made a mess of their lives.

## **Simon**

One of the fascinating things about the fact that Jesus called Matthew was the fact that Jesus also called Simon the Zealot. Here is why that is significant: The word zeal, in Scripture, refers to the quality of a person who gets angry at those who dishonor God, and they do something about it. The great illustration of a zealot in the Old Testament is Zimri, who found a man and a woman committing sin together, and put his spear through both of them. Pinned them to the ground. And Zimri is the prototype of the zealots - people who absolutely cannot stand people dishonoring God. In the New Testament, the word “zeal” took on a revolutionary flavor. Although - I always thought zealots spent all their time trying to fight against Rome, but the zealots did not really attack Romans. They attacked Jews who wanted to compromise in some way with Rome. If you were a Jew and you compromised with Rome in any way, the zealots would come after you. And they were ruthless. The zealots would publicly torture and murder Jews who compromised with Rome.

So Jesus chooses a Zealot. We do not know if Simon was more of an Old Testament type, or more of a political type, but one thing is for sure – he would have had to have taken some pretty extreme action against people in order to get that nickname – Simon the Zealot.

Do you think Simon the Zealot had just little anxieties about Matthew being in the group? If Simon would have gotten this close to Matthew before this, he would have probably stuck a knife in him. But Jesus called then both.

## Thomas

OK, back to the list. Next up is Thomas. Now, when I say “Thomas,” what characteristic do you think of? Doubt. Doubting Thomas – that is all anyone ever says about Thomas. I think Sarah Palin gets more favorable press than Thomas. He is famous for his doubting, but that is not the only thing Thomas did. If you want to get a clear picture of what kind of person Thomas was, you can see it in John 10. In John 10, Jesus and the Disciples are in hiding. The Jews had made an attempt on Jesus’ life, they escape, and in John 10:40, they retreat across the Jordan. Now they are safe in hiding. But then Jesus gets word that His good friend Lazarus was very sick. Lazarus lived in Bethany, which was right next to Jerusalem where the authorities had tried to kill Jesus. So Jesus tells His Disciples, “Grab your stuff – we’re going to Bethany.”

**John 11:8 "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews tried to stone you, and yet you are going back there?"**

“Are you kidding? We just escaped with our lives! What’s the point of fleeing if we’re going to go right back there?”

Now, what do you suppose Thomas is saying in this whole conversation? It might surprise you. In verse 16 he takes some leadership and says something to the rest of the Disciples:

**16 Let us also go that we may die with him.**

The issue with Thomas was not so much doubt as much as pessimism. It does not even occur to him that Jesus might survive this. But that does not stop him.

“We’ll die, so let’s go.”

That is pessimism, but it is also courage. The greatest courage is not the courage of the optimist, because the optimist thinks everything is going to work out just fine. The greatest courage is that of a pessimist, because he knows everything is going to be a disaster, and he is still willing to go.

If you see Thomas asking for proof of the resurrection and you interpret that as a lack of faith, that is a mistake. I do not know how you can be eager to lay down your life for Christ if you do not believe. Thomas was a man of faith and courage... and love for the Lord. Thomas loved Jesus so much, that existence without Jesus was worse than death. For Thomas, it was, “Death? Sure. Disloyalty? Never.”

So Thomas had some wonderful traits. But he definitely did struggle with pessimism. In John 14, Jesus makes one of the most precious promises in the whole Bible. What Christian has not taken delight and comfort in these words?

**John 14:1 Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.**

For 99.9% of Christians, that is one of the most comforting, wonderful statements imaginable. Not even the average pessimist could find a problem with that promise. But Thomas is not just an average pessimist.

## **5 We don't know where you are going - how can we know the way?**

Jesus makes that amazing promise and all Thomas can say is, "We're never going to be able to find the place, we'll get lost, it's not going to work..." He is like Eeyore in Winnie the Pooh.

Well, the next day they crucified Jesus. Then they put Him in the tomb. And you know what Thomas said?

"I knew it! Jesus is gone, and we are alone, and we can't go to Him — everything I was afraid of happened. Just as I feared - everything turned out terrible."

If you think he was a pessimist when Jesus was alive doing miracles and speaking words of comfort – imagine what he is like now! Thomas is depressed - because he loved so deeply. He would have died with Jesus, but Jesus died without him. He wanted to go with Jesus, but Jesus went without him. And now Thomas is so dejected that when all the Apostles were gathered... – and the resurrected Jesus appears to them – Thomas just... wasn't there. He is off alone somewhere.

### **John 20:25 So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!"**

But the only thing more difficult than trying to encourage a pessimist is trying to encourage a depressed pessimist.

### **25 ...But he said to them. "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."**

Is that doubt? It is not any worse doubt than any of the other disciples had. None of them but John believed until they actually saw Jesus. Thomas is just saying he needs proof. There is nothing wrong with requiring evidence before you believe something. Jesus gave him proof, and Thomas believed immediately.

What kind of people does Jesus use? He uses optimists who believe immediately like John and Nathaniel, and pessimists who doubt everything and assume the worst like Thomas.

## **James the son of Alpheus**

Next is James the son of Alpheus. What do you know about James the son of Alpheus? I'll tell you what you know – nothing. You do not know anything about James the son of Alpheus, because the Bible does not say anything specific about him. I love it that the Lord includes one guy in here who is just utterly obscure. He is never mentioned anywhere in the Bible except in the lists of the twelve. He never did or said anything that anyone thought was worth writing down – not even the Gospel writers. He is a nobody. Yet he will judge the twelve tribes of Israel. In heaven someday, James the son of Alpheus will be giving orders to Abraham and Moses, David, Elijah, Enoch, Job, Noah – from a throne that is next to Christ's. I am glad God is not dependent upon celebrities, aren't you?

## **Thaddeus**

Finally, Thaddeus (also known as Judas, son of James). We do not know a whole lot about Thaddeus. He is mentioned in John 14:22, where he asks a really insightful question about why Jesus was revealing Himself to the twelve and not to the whole world. If that question is any indication, I am guessing Thaddeus was a bit of a thinker.

## **Made great by their calling**

This is some group, isn't it? Can you imagine traveling around with that bunch? Can you believe *those* twelve men turned the world upside down? Jesus took this scattered, diverse, inexperienced, rag

tag conglomeration of mismatched personalities, and He made them the most successful team affecting the greatest work ever accomplished in the history of mankind. History has placed these men on stained glass windows with halos. But they were very common, ordinary men. The one thing they had in common was that none of them were clergy – all laymen.

They did become great, however. How? What made them great? It was not because they fit into some certain personality type. It was not because of their money. It was not because of their rhetoric. It was not political influence. It was not their skills. It was not even their spiritual maturity. It was their calling.

Greatness is not really very complicated. If you want to be great and to do great things, it is very simple: Just have a great God call you to do something, and do it.

And every Christian has a calling – and contrary to popular belief, God does not make your calling impossible for you to discover. It is easy. Look at your gifts and abilities and desires and passions; then look at the ministry opportunities that are available around you right now..., and pick the one that is the best match. That is your calling, and it is every bit as high a calling as the Apostles received because it comes from just as a great a God.

## **Conclusion: Go in the strength that you have**

And if you think you have too many weaknesses and not enough strengths to be of any use to God, read Judges 6. God called Gideon to save Israel from the hordes of Midian.

**Judges 6:15 “But Lord,” Gideon asked, “how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family .“**

What do you do if you are like Gideon, and you just don't have much to offer? The answer is in verse 14.

**14 The LORD turned to him and said, “Go in the strength you have ... Am I not sending you?”**

Isn't that what the Lord Jesus is saying to you right now? Stop using inability and weakness as an excuse - am I not sending you? Go in the strength you have. God uses weak vessels, but He requires of those vessels all the strength they have.

What resources do you have? Are you like Peter? Your mouth gets you into trouble, sometimes you talk a little better game than you play? You have trouble with self-control? Work on shoring up your weaknesses, but in the meantime, go in the strength you have.

Are you like Andrew? Quiet, shy, soft-spoken, always in someone's shadow? Are you like the sons of thunder - bull in a china shop? Maybe you are a teenager - young and inexperienced like Jesus' best friend, John. Or maybe you are old and feel like you cannot do much anymore like John did later. Go in the strength that you have.

Are you like Philip? Is it hard for you to trust - hard to see past circumstances? Limited understanding? Are you like Nathaniel? You struggle with prejudice. Maybe you are like Matthew. Way behind in your knowledge of Scripture - made a mess out of your life. Some of you are like Thomas - pessimistic. You are sitting there fretting because your lunch plans today probably are not going to work out. You have trouble trusting in the goodness of God. Could be that you are a zealot like Simon. You have fiery passion about the Lord, and you cannot stand it when people dishonor him. Maybe you are like Thaddeus – you ask the hard questions. Maybe you are like James the son of Alphaeus - nobody ever heard of you and nobody ever will.

Whatever you are, whatever God made you, however He designed you and put you together, whatever strength you have been given; seek out what God has called you to do and go in the strength you have.

**BENEDICTION: Hebrews 13:20-21** May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, 21 equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.