

## **Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church**

(March 12, 2017)

Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

**Sermon Series:** Jesus - for the Other

### **The Twelve He Chose**

(selected passages from Matthew)

Study #2

**Introduction:** Getting “off” or “on” the bus...

I played basketball on my schools’ teams from the elementary years through about 11<sup>th</sup> grade. I was an OK player. I made the teams, but I really wasn’t all that good. I wasn’t a star.

I could have been great, though, if I had just been a few inches taller and if I had talent. Just two things were missing. What a shame.<sup>1</sup>

It’s been a while since I’ve played basketball. But I’m confident that if I were to show up at a park for a pick-up game, I’d be about the last one chosen when it came time to divide up teams, because when you’re choosing teams, you choose players who will help you win.

Basketball was my game and not baseball. So, when I tried out for a Little League baseball team in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the coach quickly saw that I was NOT what he was looking for. On “cut day” my name wasn’t on the team roster. I didn’t make the cut.

Or, as Jim Collins, who wrote the bestselling book, Good to Great, (2001) would say it, the coach tossed me “off the bus.” The “bus” is one of the lingering images from Collins’ book.

He wrote that great leaders work hard to get the wrong people “off the bus” and the right people “on the bus” if they want to build successful businesses. The key to success is getting high level personnel on board.

That’s true across the board. When Tim Duncan retired, the Spurs went all in to keep Kawhi Leonard and to bring LaMarcus Aldridge from Portland to San Antonio to keep the team competitive.

Off the bus. On the bus. Assemble a team of winners if you want to win.

*You and Jesus’ team...*

Jesus chose twelve disciples to make impact for God’s kingdom. He put twelve men on His bus.

That means, of course, that there were a lot of people who didn’t make it on to Jesus’ bus. Have you ever wondered how the disciples who weren’t chosen to be among the Twelve felt?

How would you have felt if you weren’t chosen to be on Jesus’ bus? Or do you think that you would have had a seat on His bus? Why? Or why not? Would you have been one of the Twelve He chose?

There is certainly no way to know, but I’d like for you to mull that thought this morning, because today we are going to take what I think is a fascinating look at Jesus as He assembles His team.

Whether you know much about the twelve apostles or not, whether you are very familiar with Jesus’ story or not, and whether you think you’d be on Jesus’ bus or not, what we’re going to see from the Bible is life-changing, challenging, provocative stuff.

We’ll take a running start, first observing Jesus at work announcing and preparing people for the coming kingdom.

One of His preparation tactics was teaching and preaching.

---

<sup>1</sup> One good friend described his teenaged athletic career this way. It applies to my own story much more to me than it does to his.

## Observing King Jesus' Kingdom-Building Strategy

### The Works of King Jesus

#### *Teaching and preaching*

He gave His first message in the village of Capernaum and called the Jews of His day to repentance, [4:17] **"...for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** (meaning, "I'm here!") He gave this message repeatedly as He traveled throughout Israel.

He gave the greatest sermon ever on a mountain-top in Galilee. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), He explained how those who make up His kingdom are to live.

And, of course, He announced the coming of the kingdom with powerful miracles.

#### *Signs and wonders*

##### Miracles and exorcisms

He rebuked a storm on the Sea of Galilee, showing His power over the forces of nature. (8:23-27)

He showed His power over demonic forces by casting out a horde of demons from two men of Gadara (8:28-34). He cast out an evil spirit from a Jewish man. (9:32-34)

And, of course, He healed the sick.

##### Healings

On at least a couple of occasions lots of people who were suffering from various ailments came to Him. He healed them.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> See Matthew 8:14-17; 9:35.

Matthew tells that He cleansed one man of leprosy (8:1-4), healed the servant of a highly respected Roman centurion (8:5-13), healed Simon Peter's mother-in-law of a fever (9:14-17), and healed a paralytic in a home (9:1-8).

On one day, He healed an older woman of a long-standing disease while raising a young girl from the dead. (99:18-31)

King Jesus showed His power over nature, over demons, and over sickness and disease. He was showing in every way that He was the long-awaited Messiah. The kingdom was at hand.

But Jesus didn't ever intend to operate solo. From the earliest days, He was at work recruiting a team.

### The Team King Jesus Built

#### *Early recruiting*

In the first century, the pattern was that a Jewish man would approach a rabbi and ask for the privilege of studying under that rabbi. He would become that rabbi's disciple (learner; follower).

Jesus turned that pattern on its head. He, the rabbi, took the initiative and invited people to follow Him.

Right after that first message He gave in the Capernaum synagogue, He invited four fishermen to follow Him. They all dropped their fishing nets and followed.<sup>3</sup>

A few months later, He saw Capernaum's chief tax-collector, hard at work cheating his fellow Jews out of money. Jesus invited him to tag along, too, and the tax collector followed Jesus.

As we read through those early chapters in Matthew, we aren't told that He invited others to follow. But He did. I think He did a lot of that. And a lot of people were following.

---

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 4:20.

But at a certain point - not long after that tax collector began following - Jesus faced a watershed decision.

He looked out at the crowds of people who had gathered to listen to Him and to be healed. His heart broke over their brokenness.

He saw people who were like sheep without a shepherd. They were distressed and depressed. Jesus had to decide what was His next step. It was a critical moment, demanding a wise, strategic move.

The crowds were growing. He could have decided to simply keep drawing bigger and bigger crowds to meet more and more needs. But that is not what He decided.

No, He turned to those who were closest to Him and told them, **[9:37] “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. [38] Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest.”**

What was needed was not more work from Jesus, but more workers. To multiply kingdom of God impact, He would have to multiply workers.

And it would start with prayer. Notice that Jesus told His followers to **“beseech”** God for more workers. We don’t use the word “beseech” much these days. But it’s a good word. It means “ask” on steroids. It is to plead, to beg.

When you want something so badly it almost hurts, you “beseech.” Jesus told His followers to “beseech” God to send out more workers into a ripe harvest.

And immediately after that call to prayer, Jesus took bold action. (Bold prayer frequently births bold action.) Out of the larger group that was following, He selected a dozen for special access and for special ops.

*His team’s “kingdom impact” assignments (10:1)*

**[10:1] Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.**

The group size was important. Twelve was manageable. Twelve allowed for both intimacy and for critical mass for great impact.

And by what He gave them authority to do (v. 1), we understand that the twelve disciples (His team) would be doing exactly what He has been doing. They are chosen to maximize and to multiply the kingdom impact Jesus was already making.

And here is the team.

*His team (10:2-4)*

**[2] Now the names of the twelve apostles are these: The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother;<sup>4</sup> and James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; [3] Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus; [4] Simon the Zealot, and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him.**

First, just a few quick observations about the guys on the bus.

The group is made up of at least two sets of brothers. Peter and Andrew are brothers. James and John are brothers. It’s also possible that the other James (often referred to as “James the Lesser”) is a brother to Matthew, as they are both called **“sons of Alphaeus”**.<sup>5</sup>

Several of them - at least four - were fishermen.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> John/Jonah was the father of Peter and Andrew. Zebedee, the father of James and John.

<sup>5</sup> It could be a different Alphaeus, but I think that’s unlikely.

<sup>6</sup> While an honorable profession, fishermen were not considered spiritual heavyweights, nor would anyone expect them to be in the Messiah’s confidence.

We know that Matthew was a tax collector for the hated Romans and that Simon (called “the Zealot”) was a member of a radical political party that violently opposed Rome.<sup>7</sup>

All but one, Judas Iscariot, were from Galilee. Only Judas came from Judea, in the south.

Not one of them was a rabbi. There wasn’t a Pharisee or a Sadducee, a priest or scribe among them. Not a single seminary or Bible college graduate. They were ordinary men of their day.

But this was Jesus’ team. And immediately after granting them the authority to act in His Name, He sent them on a mission.

### **The Training Regimen of King Jesus**

*They were sent to the lost sheep of Israel (chapter 10)*

***[5] These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: “Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; [6] but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.***

The entire 10<sup>th</sup> chapter is given to preparing these men for this, their first mission. They were to preach and teach, heal and cast out evil spirits.

Jesus told them that they would face hardships and rejection. He promised them God’s provision along the way and great reward from God for faithfulness.

And off the twelve went, “on mission.” This was the beginning of their training<sup>8</sup> and their training continued for as long as Jesus lived.

*They were with Him every step of the way*

For roughly two years, they went everywhere He went and watched everything He did.

They saw Him heal and cast out demons. They heard all of His teaching. They served with Him and He interacted with them deeply.

They came to know His heart. The training was varied and intense and non-stop. He taught them the primacy of dependence on God, moral courage, commitment, servanthood, world vision, and love.

They took notes as they watched Him interact with notorious sinners and with the religious elite.

His mission was to train them for apostleship. They would be the ones leading the kingdom charge after He gave His life on the cross. During those two years, they walked the roads of Israel together, ate together, lived together.

Then, at the end - *after* Jesus’ trials before the Jewish Sanhedrin and before Pontius Pilate, *after* Judas’ betrayal and Peter’s denials, *after* Jesus had been scourged by Roman soldiers and crucified, *after* His resurrection from the dead, and *after* His numerous post-resurrection appearances - Jesus gave His disciples one more commission.

We find it at the end of the book.

*They were sent to the whole world (chapter 28)*

***[28:18] And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. [19] “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”***

This address is so central to what Jesus called His disciples to do that we have named it. We call it “the Great Commission.”

<sup>7</sup> Including Simon the Zealot and Matthew in the same group would have introduced very challenging relational dynamics, to say the least.

<sup>8</sup> Note the book, *The Training of the Twelve*, by A.B. Bruce, a masterful exploration of how Jesus trained these ordinary men for apostleship. I highly recommend it if you are looking for a challenging read about disciple-making.

There is one command here. It is to “make disciples.” Each of the Twelve was a disciple, and everywhere each one of them went, as they went, wherever they went, they were to train others to be disciples as they had been trained to be disciples by Jesus.

They were to teach these new disciples to obey everything that Jesus taught. They were to baptize these new disciples.

And the scope is global. Jesus told His (now eleven) disciples to fulfill this disciple-making mandate in **“all the nations.”** And they were to never fear. He has authority in heaven and on earth and He will be with them forever.

That’s the Great Commission. And it is both amazing and inspiring to watch what these guys did with the Great Commission.

We read about what they did with it in the book of Acts, the Bible book that, chronologically, follows the four Gospels.

### **King Jesus’ [Delegated] Success**

*Through the book of Acts*

Acts starts off with the final earthly scene of Jesus. He is with the apostles. This time, they are near Jerusalem. He tells them to be His witnesses everywhere, listing, in order, **[1:8] “...Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest place on the earth.”**

I encourage you, sometime soon, to trace the geographical reach of the Gospel through the book of Acts. When you do, you’ll see that they fulfilled Acts 1:8, in the order Jesus gave it.

Moving outward as if through concentric circles, they started off in Jerusalem, made progress through Judea, crossed ethnic lines by reaching out to Samaria, and then began the work of evangelizing, disciple-making, and church planting to more and more remote areas, crossing both cultural and geographic borders.

Simon Peter (“Rocky”) was the recognized leader in Jerusalem and it was he who actually opened the door to non-Jews to come to faith in Christ.

Eventually, another apostle was added to the band, a man named Saul, from Tarsus. We know him as the Apostle Paul, and he made it his aim to take the Gospel where people had never even heard the name, “Jesus.”

And, yes, there were losses along the way.

James, the brother of John, was the first martyr. He died at the hands of Herod.<sup>9</sup> John, James’ brother, was exiled to the Mediterranean island prison of Patmos. He may have died in prison or he may have been cruelly tortured and killed. Others, apostles and those reached by the apostles, suffered terrible persecution.

But the record we find in Acts tells us that Jesus’ disciples were faithful. And what we know of the history post-Acts 28 confirms that they continued faithful.

*Throughout history*

- ANDREW - always in the shadow of his brother, Peter, in the Gospels - was the one who had brought Nathaniel to Jesus. It’s not hard to imagine Andrew bringing lots of other friends to Christ, perhaps in what is now Russia (Andrew is the Patron Saint of Ukraine). Tradition says that Andrew died by crucifixion, just like Jesus did, for his faith.
- PHILIP is said to have been a great evangelist to Asia. Tradition says that he remained a faithful disciple and that he, also, was crucified.
- MATTHEW became an evangelist to his fellow-Jews, the same ones he had formerly cheated out of tax money. He died a martyr’s death in Ethiopia, having taken the gospel to the Jews living there.
- THOMAS took the Gospel of Jesus east, all the way to India and possibly beyond. He left behind a thriving church after he was killed for his faith.

---

<sup>9</sup> Herod Agrippa.

Although not much is known about the exploits of some of the other apostles, tradition holds that most, if not all of them, died martyrs' deaths in faithful service to Jesus.<sup>10</sup>

So, fundamentally, they did it. Empowered by the Holy Spirit and energized by Jesus' Great Commission, they did more than you would have dreamed possible.

However - and I think that this is a question worth asking - if you had been Jesus, would you have ever chosen these guys to get on the bus?

If you are putting together a team to take the NBA championship, you add LaMarcus Aldridge. You keep Kawhi Leonard.

Do these men really fit on Jesus' bus?

### **Questioning King Jesus' Kingdom-Building Strategy**

#### **Diamonds in the Rough**

*Simon ("Rocky") Peter*

Jesus nicknamed Simon "Peter" (from the Greek, *petros*, meaning "rock") to give a vision of his future, solid character. That's a good vision, because, in the Gospels, Peter wasn't very solid.

Oh, he did walk on water (and promptly sank). And he did say of Jesus **[Matthew 16:16] "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."** (and then rebuked Jesus for predicting His death)

But He panicked in the Garden when Jesus was arrested. He lopped off the ear of the High Priest before running away.

Later that night, while warming himself by a fire, after promising Jesus that even if all the other disciples fell away he wouldn't ever fall away, he denied even knowing Jesus three times.<sup>11</sup>

Peter was an erratic, impetuous, fly-off-the-handle on the spur of the moment kind of man.

*James and John*

The brothers, James and John, were notoriously bombastic and self-centered.

Once, they tried to stop someone who was casting out demons in Jesus' Name, but who was not a part of their group (Mark 9). Another time, they wanted to call down fire from heaven to consume Samaritans who had not offered a place for Jesus to sleep (Luke 9).

Then, near the end, with Jesus' death on the cross looming close, they selfishly asked Jesus for places of prominence in His kingdom. (Mark 10)

*Andrew and Philip*

Neither Andrew nor Philip had confidence that the little amount of food on hand would be sufficient for a crowd of thousands. And they ignored the possibility that the Jesus they followed - who had already stilled a storm on the sea! - might multiply fish and loaves. (John 6:1-9)

*Matthew*

Matthew had been a tax-collector when Jesus met and called him. 'Nuff said. He was hated by all and was likely a cheat.

*Thomas*

[Doubting] Thomas refused to believe that Jesus was alive even though all the other disciples told him that they had just seen Him.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> We know nothing of the ministries of Simon the Zealot, James, the son of Alphaeus, or Thaddaeus.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 26:33-35; 69-75.

<sup>12</sup> See John 20.

These more prominent disciples were all works in progress, very rough diamonds in the rough. Others were nothing more than faces in the crowd.

### Faces in the Crowd

We don't know anything at all about Bartholomew, James (the son of Alphaeus), Thaddeus (or, as Luke/Acts calls him, Judas, the son of James), or Simon the Zealot. Did you know that there is not one Bible story that includes any details about any of these four guys?

And then, of course, there was the snake in the grass.

### A Snake in the Grass

Judas Iscariot was the only one of the Twelve not from Galilee. We believe that he hailed from the city of Kerioth, in the supposedly more godly region of Judea.

He wasn't trustworthy, but the group trusted him and made him treasurer. He routinely stole from the money box.

Un-generous in his worship,<sup>13</sup> Judas opened himself up to satanic influence<sup>14</sup> when He saw the generous heart of Jesus. In the Garden of Gethsemane, he identified Jesus with a friendly kiss, and betrayed Him to those who went on to kill Him.<sup>15</sup>

This group of twelve, just as they are, is the apostolic team Jesus chose.<sup>16</sup>

### Conclusion:

If Jesus had given you a list with these twelve names on it, told you, *"This is my team. These are the guys are on My bus."* - what kind of kingdom-impact results would you have predicted from their efforts?

I suspect you would not have had high hopes.

What we've seen from Scripture this morning may have surprised you. You might have assumed that Jesus' apostles were men set apart, spiritual super-heroes. The Bible says they weren't.

And I'll warn you now against either of two extremes when you think of those Jesus chose to ride on His bus.

On the one hand, don't put them on a pedestal. They weren't perfect and they weren't bigger than life. They were mostly nice guys. They were hard workers. Salt of the earth. But they all had some character flaws and were woefully lacking in leadership gifts.

On the other hand, don't roast them as a bunch of losers. Don't harp on how, *"They just didn't get it."* They were not hopelessly inept. Think of what they were being exposed to, what they were asked to internalize. How would you have done?

The Twelve were, very simply, extremely ordinary guys, used by God in extraordinary ways because they were empowered by the Holy Spirit and were captured by Jesus' Great Commission.

*A different view of the mirror...*

It is tempting for us to think that the person Jesus wants on His bus is the bigger-than-life person. Or, at least, the together person.

Nonsense. He has made an ages long practice of using the not-together, failed and flawed, socially awkward, struggling person to make great kingdom impact.

<sup>13</sup> Judas objected to the extravagant worship of Mary who anointed Jesus with expensive perfume. (John 12:1-8)

<sup>14</sup> The devil put it into Judas' heart to betray Jesus (John 13:1-4)

<sup>15</sup> He betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. (Matthew 26:14-16). Afterwards, he experienced remorse, returned the money, was rejected by the chief priests and elders, and committed suicide. (Matthew 27:3-10)

<sup>16</sup> See Appendix for a (hopefully) humorous set of insights into the Twelve.

Yes, He uses “together” people, too. But when, say, a prideful, legalistic bigot who murders people makes impact for God, we all stand back and think, *“Look at what God has done!”*

This is how one murdering, legalistic bigot spoke of his own story.

***[1 Timothy 1:12] I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, [13] even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor...[15] It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all.***

If you ever feel like you don't belong on Jesus' bus, you're not alone. But if Jesus chose Paul for His team, is it so surprising that your name is on the roster, too?

Just try putting yourself in Paul's words -

***[1 Timothy 1:12] I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened ME, because He considered ME faithful, putting ME into service, [13] even though I was formerly a (fill in the blank)\_\_\_\_\_.***

When you look in the mirror, you are looking at someone with gifts and talents, interests and passions that can all be leveraged for Jesus.

And, yes, you have faults and failings, you have messed up and have been messed with. Just like every other disciple ever.

You are exactly the person Jesus wants on His bus. You are on His bus. You are on His team.

*A different view out the window...*

The way we see ourselves will always directly impact how we see our place in God's story. And, since you are on God's team...

- you are commissioned to make disciples wherever you are and wherever you go;
- you are to have an eye on the nations;
- you are to teach those into whom you are pouring your life to obey Jesus' commands;
- you are to fear nothing because Jesus - who has all authority - is always with you.

So...

- What is keeping you from volunteering for that service God has placed on your heart? You may have thought for a long time about it. It might involve service here at the church - Sunday School, involvement with missions, helping with music. Maybe it's something in the community - fostering or adopting, serving the poor. Could there possibly be a better time to start than right now?
- What is holding you back from taking that step of faith to share Jesus with your friend, or to give like you've never given?
- What is standing in the way of you praying fervently what Jesus told His first disciples to pray, that the Lord of the harvest would send out workers into His harvest, knowing that among those workers He will send out will be YOU?

If each one of us, here - adults of all ages, youth, children - were to “own” the Great Commission and depend on the power of the Holy Spirit, we would make disciples as we “go.” The poor will be served, the lost will be found, chains will be broken that bind the addicted, families will be restored, and wrecked relationships will be rebuilt.

And that, my friends, is how a church of our size impacts tens of thousands. And who gets the glory when that happens? Yep - Jesus.

Frankly, I salivate to think of what God might do through you and through us if every one who is a part of what is going on here were fully “on mission” for the Great Commission.

And I rejoice every time I hear of your service, not only because of what your service will do for the ones you serve, but for what your involvement with God's purposes will do for your own soul, and, most importantly, the smile it will bring to your Savior's face.



## APPENDIX

From: Jordan Management Consultants  
Nazareth, Israel

Attention: Jesus, Son of Joseph

Dear Sir:

Thank you for submitting the resumes of the twelve men you have picked for management positions in your new organization. All of them have now completed our battery of tests. We have not only run the results through our computer, but also arranged personal interviews for each of them with our psychologist and vocational aptitude consultant. The profiles of all tests are included and you will want to study them carefully.

As part of our service, and for your guidance, we make some general comments, much as an auditor will include an evaluation of financial statements.

It is the staff opinion that most of your nominees are lacking in background, education, and vocational aptitude for the type of enterprise you are undertaking. (They especially do not have any concept of "team.")

We recommend that you continue your search for persons with more substantial education, definable aptitudes, and proven experience in areas of management, marketing, and public relations.

Some specific analyses follow:

- Simon Peter is emotionally unstable and given to fits of temper.
- Andrew has absolutely no qualities of leadership.
- The two sons of Zebedee, James and John, place personal interest above company loyalty.
- Thomas demonstrates a negative attitude that would tend to undermine morale.
- We feel that it is our duty to tell you that Matthew has been blacklisted by the Greater Jerusalem Business Bureau.
- James, the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus definitely have radical tendencies, and had alarming readings on the manic-depressive scale.

One of the candidates, however, shows great potential. He is a man of ability and resourcefulness, meets people well, has a keen business mind and has contacts in high places. He is highly motivated and ambitious. We do recommend Judas Iscariot as your controller.

All the other profiles are self-explanatory and we feel confident that you will concur with our findings.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our professional management analysis and look forward to assisting you with any subsequent staff analyses.

Sincerely yours,

Jordan Management Consultants