

2022 New Year Message

Jesus Chose The Twelve

Luke 6:9-19

Key Verse : Luke 6:12-13

"One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles."

We give thanks and praise to God for blessing the year 2021. I pray that, through this passage, God may help us to set a clear spiritual direction for the new year 2022.

In Luke 6:1-5, Jesus was going through the grainfields with his disciples on the Sabbath. In order to serve God's will Jesus lived a life dependent on God without a place to lay his head. The disciples who followed Jesus also lived the same life style, and at times they skipped a few meals. One Sabbath, as they were passing through the grainfields, the disciples ate some heads of grain by rubbing them with their hands. If I saw them doing this, I would feel pity for them. It is a normal human feeling to have sympathy to serve hungry people with a warm meal. However, the Pharisees sharply criticized the disciples saying, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" They valued keeping the Sabbath law more important than saving lives. They were legalistic.

On another Sabbath Jesus went into the synagogue and was teaching, and a man was there whose right hand was shriveled. The people gathered on the Sabbath to hear the word of God, similar to Sunday worship service of today. Jesus taught them God's word. That day in the synagogue there was a man whose right hand was shriveled. It meant that the nerves and muscles of his hand were dead. He had both hands, but he could not use his most active and useful right hand at all. He couldn't play a musical instrument. He couldn't tie his shoelaces. When someone reached out their right hand to shake hands with him, he quickly put out his left hand, and embarrassed the other person. His shriveled hand must've made his heart shriveled with a sense of inferiority complex. He might have had a guilty conscience about his disability. There was no real rest in his heart. Jesus saw him and had mercy on him. Jesus wanted to heal him.

The religious leaders were supposed to be shepherds of the people. But what did they do? The Pharisees and the teachers of the law were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. They used the man as a means of finding a reason to accuse Jesus. No matter how weak or vulnerable a person may be, one cannot be used as a means to an end. Human beings are made in the image of God. Trying to achieve something by using people is wicked and evil.

Jesus knew their thoughts and their evil schemes. In order to avoid conflict with the religious leaders, Jesus could have said to the man, "Today is the Sabbath. Can you come back tomorrow?" or, "I will see you after today's meeting." But what did Jesus say? He said to the man, "Get up and stand in front of everyone." By this, he challenged the wickedness of the religious leaders.

As the man stood in the middle of the synagogue, Jesus said to the Pharisees, "I ask you, which

is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" They only thought about whether it was right or wrong to work on the Sabbath. But Jesus challenged them saying, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" Whether to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it, all these things are doing something. Here we can learn that the Sabbath is not a day of rest for doing nothing, but a day of rest for doing something good. Doing good means saving lives. When a person is saved, that person finds rest, and the one who has done good deeds also enjoys rest. The religious leaders did not help the man, leaving him in a restless state.

In verse 10, Jesus looked around at the crowd and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." It was never easy for the man to stretch out his withered hand. Actually it was physically impossible for him to obey. But he obeyed Jesus' word. He put his hand forward. Then his shriveled hand was stretched out. Wow! It was truly amazing. His hand was fully restored! He could move his hand freely, stretching and pulling, raising and lowering, turning forward and backward. The dead nerves were revived and the muscles were re-created. Truly, it was a miracle that only God the Almighty Creator could do. Jesus, who healed the man's withered hand, is the one who saves us from our sins and weaknesses and restores us completely. He is the Christ who makes us children of God and gives us true rest and salvation.

The religious leaders should have rejoiced over the man's healing. Witnessing the amazing miracle, they should have accepted Jesus as the Christ and bowed down before him. But how did they respond? They were furious and began to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus. Being furious means being full of anger. Anger is a desire to hurt others. Anger has the same motive as murder (Mt 5:21,22). Rather than repenting of their sins, they were offended and furious that Jesus had violated the Sabbath. They discussed with each other how to get rid of him. They became spiritually blind because they were engrossed in the traditions their forefathers had made in order to protect the Jewish community from secular influence. The Pharisees claimed to be the shepherds of the people. But they only prided themselves in their position and were indifferent to people in need (Ro 2:17-23). The people of the time were wandering like sheep without shepherds and became the prey of the devil.

What did Jesus do in that dark time? Look at verse 12. "One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God." Jesus went to a mountainside to pray. Jesus always lived a life of prayer. When he began his messianic ministry, Jesus was baptized by John and prayed. At that time, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in bodily form like a dove (Lk 3:21-22). Then Jesus was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness and was tempted by the devil while Jesus was fasting and praying for 40 days. Jesus often went to a solitary place after serving a great work of God. He had fellowship with God the Father, and was empowered by the Spirit. However, going to a mountainside to pray this time had a more special meaning. This was because this time Jesus' prayer was more than prayer for an intimate fellowship with God. It was a desperate prayer to seek direction for solving the problems of the time. Luke 6:12 emphasizes the fact that Jesus went out to a mountainside to 'pray' and spent the night 'praying' to God.

Jesus prayed all night on a mountain. Many do not know how cold a night on a mountain is and how slowly time passes by. Many years ago, when I stood guard overnight at a military outpost, I realized how cold winter nights were and how slowly time passed by. Even now, I can't forget the thrill and joy of seeing the sunlight and enjoying the warmth when the eastern sky brightened the dark night and the sun rose over the mountain. Regardless of the night dew

and the cold, Jesus prayed all night on the mountain.

What did Jesus pray for? We do not know the details of Jesus' prayer. But if we think about him before and after his prayer, we can infer the content of his prayer. Jesus must have prayed regarding his dark times. His heart was broken because of the wicked religious leaders and because the people were wandering like sheep without a shepherd. Jesus must have brought those problems to God and sought how to serve the generation. As Jesus prayed deeply, he found what the fundamental problem of his time was. Reforming the priesthood or eradicating the religious leaders was not the solution. Jesus did not focus on fighting the Pharisees and removing them. It was because he knew that in all those problems the root issue was not fighting with people or the social system, but fighting with the devil. The devil that Jesus had defeated in the wilderness was still working behind the religious leaders. The devil incited the pride of the leaders and blinded their spiritual eyes. The devil blinded their minds so that they could not see Christ, but opposed him (2Co 4:4).

His battle was not against flesh and blood, but against the evil spirits that rule this world and their leader, the devil (Eph 6:12). So, through his prayers, Jesus fought the spiritual battle to gain discernment and power from God. He stayed up all night praying with all his heart, and finally the dawn arrived and the morning sun rose. The light came into Jesus' heart, and a clear spiritual direction from God was set in him. What did Jesus do?

Look at verse 13. "When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles." Jesus called the disciples who were together with him. In verse 17, there was still "a large crowd of his disciples" at the foot of the mountain. So, the 'disciples' were those who continued to follow Jesus, unlike the crowds who sometimes gathered and dispersed. It is not known how many disciples were with Jesus on the mountain, but it was probably around 70 (Lk 10:1). Jesus chose twelve among them. On what basis did he choose the twelve? Mark 3:13, says, "Jesus went up the mountain, and he called those he wanted, and they came to him." "He called those he wanted" does not mean that he called them according to his mood. Rather, it meant that Jesus, having been with them, observed them, and called those whom he thought worthy of special nurture as his disciples. That call was entirely according to the sovereign will of Jesus.

Jesus chose twelve and called them "apostles." The word "apostle" means "one who is sent." It refers to those sent directly from Jesus to preach the gospel. Jesus' life on earth was limited. In the future, Jesus would have to complete the gospel mission through the cross and resurrection, and then return to God. Workers were needed who would preach the gospel, which gives salvation to everyone who hears and believes it. Jesus called the twelve to be missionaries of evangelism. Of course, they were not yet at the apostle level. Jesus just called them with a vision of raising them as outstanding disciples, and enabling them to fulfill the office of apostles in the future. Jesus knew that the work of evangelism was spiritual warfare. He knew that it was a spiritual battle against the devil, not against established religious leaders or social structures or institutions. Warriors are important in warfare. The apostles were leaders who knew the heart of Jesus and would receive the power of His Holy Spirit to lead the spiritual battle of gospel preaching. Jesus wanted to raise the twelve as spiritual generals. He set a direction to train and raise them up as apostles who would bear with any kind of hardship and boldly preach the gospel.

How did Jesus raise his disciples? When we hear the words "Jesus raised up and trained his

disciples,” or “He raised them as generals,” we tend to think of training people just like in the military or in a business. That's why we make discipleship programs and make special training courses. We create various courses and give them a certificate of completion or a diploma. Such training or curriculum is very helpful. However, completing a certain program or course does not mean becoming a disciple of Jesus. In order to become a disciple of Jesus, knowledge is important, but above all, one's character and faith are crucial. Mark 3:14 says, "He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach." The first purpose of Jesus' appointing of the twelve was that they might "be with him." This meant to have the twelve always with Jesus so that they might learn his words and, especially, his life. We also must walk with Jesus and learn not only his words of truth but also imitate his love and humility, his service and sacrifice, his gentleness and wisdom, and his faith and life of prayer. This is a true relationship between a teacher and a disciple. If we give a certain title just because one has gained knowledge, we easily end up producing a group of spiritual elites. Such people can become modern-day Pharisees. As disciples of Jesus, we must first learn of Jesus himself. Apostle Paul wanted to know and learn of Jesus throughout his life, and therefore, he could become a good disciple of Jesus (Php 3:10). The same is true as we raise disciples. We must help disciples learn from Jesus, and imitate us in ways that we strive to learn from Jesus (Php 3:17).

Today's universities have long been merely places of knowledge transfer. People go to college to get good jobs and careers. A true teacher and disciple relationship is rare on the campuses. In the last two years of the Corona pandemic, people have become more individualistic and are distanced from others. Rather than gathering on campus, students increasingly gather in the so-called metaverse to talk and live. The physical existence of the campus itself, occupying the land and buildings, is increasingly being questioned. Today's college students are like wandering sheep without a shepherd. Also, anti-Christian forces are gaining strength in the name of protecting social minorities. Those who have preoccupied the frame of protecting minorities are waging a political war in their fields. Ephesians 6:12 says: “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” Our struggle is not against people. Nor is it against a social system. It is the devil that we fight against in spiritual warfare which has continued fiercely since the fall of Adam, and will continue until the return of the Lord.

Satan's strategy is to secretly act as if he doesn't exist. He tempts people to be so occupied with other things that they may not be interested in spiritual things. He puts people in political and economic fights. Through this, the devil blinds people's hearts, so that the glorious light of the gospel of Christ cannot shine on them (2 Co 4:4). Jesus fought the devil through prayers. He also decided to raise outstanding disciples who would continue such spiritual battles. We, too, need to know the existence of the devil and his crafty schemes. So, we should strive to pray to gain spiritual discernment and power. War requires wise and brave generals. If the generals are strong, they win. What is the way for us to serve not only this generation but all generations to come? It is to raise spiritual generals, that is, outstanding disciples of Jesus. I pray that we will accept this and, in this year, do our best to pray with all our hearts, and raise excellent disciples of Jesus.

Who were the twelve chosen by Jesus? They were: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor. Luke

singles out Simon whom Jesus named “Peter” as the key disciple. There was a risk of conflicts among 12 competitive young men when Jesus deliberately was going to raise a top disciple. Yet, Jesus chose to make Simon the top disciple. This was the wisdom of Jesus. After the ascension of the Lord, Peter took on the role of the leader who led the twelve apostles and the church.

We can find some characteristics of the twelve: First, they were ordinary people who were faithful in their work; second, when they were called by Jesus, they made a decision to willingly follow Jesus, leaving everything behind; third, they were those who wanted to learn; fourth, they were from all walks of life and various professions, but none of them were from religious leaders. In other words, they were teachable people like new wine skins. Why did Jesus choose only twelve? This was probably because twelve people were the maximum number that Jesus could personally help while staying together. Beyond that number, it would be difficult to form a personal and intimate relationship. Also, the twelve symbolizes the twelve tribes of Israel, which means the whole world. Jesus appointed twelve apostles to preach the gospel to the whole world.

Jesus went down the mountain with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over Judea, from Jerusalem, and from the coastal region around Tyre and Sidon, who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Jesus did not take the twelve deep into a mountain, and pass on knowledge for three years. Instead, he came down to the plains where people lived and many troubles were. There Jesus confronted the practical problems of people and taught his twelve disciples how to serve people. Around Jesus, there were a large crowd of disciples and a large number of people from all over the regions who came to hear the words of Jesus and to be healed. Among them, those suffering from unclean spirits were healed. Jesus had practical power to cast out demons and heal diseases.

The disciples of Jesus must have two things. The first is spiritual knowledge and discernment based on the gospel truth. To this end, Jesus was always with the twelve, teaching them the gospel and filling them with the truth. The twelve were able to deeply learn the word of God through the gracious and powerful teachings of Jesus. Peter, who was a fisherman, came to have such a profound understanding of the Bible because he heard and learned the truth while walking with Jesus. What Peter learned from Jesus became the foundation, and when he was later filled with the Holy Spirit, he was able to testify to the truth with boldness and great confidence. The second thing the disciples must have is spiritual power. Afterward, Jesus’ disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and given the power to cast out demons and heal diseases. A disciple of Jesus must have the word of truth and spiritual power. Only then can one serve God’s people as a leader who overcomes the spiritual battle against the devil.

In conclusion, when we see our times, there are seemingly many political, economic and social problems, yet there is only one real problem. It is the spiritual battle against the devil. Jesus has called us to be warriors and disciples in this spiritual battle. How can we win the battle? As Jesus did, we must pray with all our hearts and be empowered with the Spirit. Jesus raised a small number of disciples as apostles, and established God’s new covenant community. This is what Jesus would do if he were here in the world today. As for me, I pray that this year I would serve the two senior shepherds in England to grow into outstanding disciples of Jesus. For this, I pray that I would first devote myself to prayer, and to learning the character and faith of Jesus. I earnestly pray that God would bless us this year as a community of spiritual warriors fighting

against the devil on campuses around the world. In the year 2022, may God bless us as a disciple-making community that prays. Amen!