

THE STORY OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons (Mark 3:14-15).

Did you know that the Lord had many disciples? And that from these disciples, He chose twelve that He would send forth to do His work? The twelve selected from the many disciples would be called apostles (Luke 6:13). For a disciple is a follower, and an apostle is someone who is sent forth.

Let us picture what happened to these twelve men who were chosen to be the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. Two of them, John and Andrew, had first met the Lord when they were followers of John the Baptist. When they saw the Lord, they did not know anything about Him, but John the Baptist pointed to Him and said, "Behold! the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29,36). Those words must have affected John and Andrew, for they began to follow the Lord. And these words affect us, too. We think of the strong sphere of innocence that the Lord has and which has such a beautiful effect in taking away what is wrong in the world. Indeed, each time we have a really happy time without any feelings of anger, or hatred, or ill-will to others, we should rejoice in the presence of the One who takes away the sin of the world.

We do not know what the Lord told those two young followers when they first spent part of a day with Him, but it was enough that Andrew wanted to go and tell his brother Simon. And when Simon came to the Lord, the Lord looked at him and then gave him a special name. This is important, for the Lord looks at all who are willing to follow Him, and He knows just what their quality is, which is represented by naming. To Simon, the Lord gave the name of Peter, meaning the rock, or faith.

Next, the Lord found a disciple whose name means a lover of horses. This was Philip. Since a horse means an understanding of the Word, think of Philip as someone who loved to learn. And he loved to tell others what he had learned, for after he was called, he went out and found another man to be a disciple also. This man's name was Nathanael (sometimes called Bartholomew). Jesus saw this man Nathanael coming toward Him, and said that he was a man in whom there was no guile (John 1:47). Having no guile means that someone is sincere and does not pretend to be what he is not. How surprised Nathanael was to hear the Lord speak in this way! He asked, "How do You know me?" (John 1:48). Jesus told him that He had seen him even before Philip called Him. This gave those first few disciples an idea of the Lord's knowledge of all people. As we grow older, we, too, come to realize how well the Lord knows us.

After the Lord had recognized Nathanael, He said, "You will see greater things than this" (John 1:50). And those first five disciples—John, Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathanael—did see something wonderful soon, for they all attended a wedding where the Lord did the first of His miracles. He turned water to wine. By this

miracle Jesus “manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him” (John 2:11). Manifesting His glory means that the Lord showed something of His wonderful power. The disciples saw a flash of the Lord’s inner glory, like seeing a flash of the sun’s light within a cloud, and they believed in Him.

The disciples saw something else soon after that, which they would never forget. They went with the Lord to Jerusalem, where He boldly went into the temple, and with a whip, drove out the moneychangers and overturned their tables. He did this with such force that it reminded the disciples of a Psalm about having burning zeal for the house of God (John 2:17). To those people who protested, Jesus then said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). But He was speaking of the temple of His body. And three years later, when the Lord had risen from the dead, “His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:22).

When the Lord and His disciples came back from Jerusalem into the land of Galilee, those first disciples returned to their fishing. They continued this until the day that Jesus walked on the shore. He first called to the brothers, Simon and Andrew, “Come after Me, and I will make you become fishers of men.’ And immediately they left their nets and followed Him” (Mark 1:18). When He had gone a little further, He saw John with his brother James in a boat, mending fish nets, and He called them to follow, too.

As those disciples followed, they saw the Lord do wonderful things. He commanded evil spirits to go away. He made Peter’s wife’s mother well from a fever just by the touch of His hand. The disciples also heard the Lord speak with great power and saw crowds of people thronging to see Him.

Then another disciple was called, one who was not a fisherman. This was Matthew (or Levi). He had been sitting collecting taxes, and Jesus, as He passed by, simply said, “Follow Me” (Matthew 9:9). And Matthew arose and followed the Lord.

Up until this point, the disciples had only been followers of the Lord. But now Jesus chose twelve whom He would send forth. These twelve became apostles. In chapter 3 of the book of Mark we are told their names:

Simon, to whom He gave the name Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James...Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Cananite; and Judas Iscariot... (verses 16-19).

These men became not just followers, but doers and teachers. They followed the Lord in the world and after His death they went out and spread the good news that He had brought into the world. They established the Christian Church. And these apostles (several of whom died for their faith) went to heaven, where centuries later they were called together by the Lord once more and sent out in the spiritual world to preach the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ reigns.

Amen.