

God was not pleased with the Jewish leaders. He sent Jesus into the world to give everyone a new and better way to please God. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told the multitude, "I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven." Matthew 5:20. Later, when the Pharisees were upset that he ate with unwashed hands Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them." Luke 11:46. Then he added in Luke 11:52, "Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering."

For those reasons, and many more, God decided the time had come for a major change. As John records it, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him.¹⁸ Whoever believes in Him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son." John 3:16-18. This purpose was expressed in many different ways.

God did not send just anybody. It was a major job. He wanted a new covenant, new priest, and a new king; not just for the Jews but for everyone. So he sent one of the Godhead, the one who had created the world. We might call him God's chief engineer.

When someone is sent to do such a major job, he needs several things: trust, power, the ability to pick and train helpers, etc. In this case, he needs a body so he can interact with those he is trying to help. More importantly, he must have a body so he can be lifted up as the Lamb of God when he is sacrificed on the cross for our sins.

God gave Jesus many of the things he needed to fulfill the Law and the prophets. He gave him the right parents, birth at the right place, the wise men, siblings to let him learn caring and sharing, a working father to teach him scriptures, a trade, and the custom of going to the synagogue to study the scriptures. Those wise men were important. Not only did they not tell Herod how to find Jesus, but they probably gave them enough resources to fund the trip to Egypt. Joseph and Mary were poor at the time of Mary's purification. And Jesus will tell us that God gave him much more. Guidance was continuous.

John the Baptist, the advance man God sent, probably did more than anyone else to give Jesus a successful start. John had convinced hundreds of people that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand before Jesus started his ministry. It was John who introduced Jesus as the Messiah. "John testified about Him and cried out, saying, 'This was He of whom I said; He who comes after me has a higher rank than I, for He existed before me.'¹⁶ For of His fullness we have all received, and grace upon grace.¹⁷ **For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realized through Jesus Christ.**" John 1:15-17.

When Jesus was ready to start his ministry, trust and power came at the same time. “As soon as Jesus was baptized, He went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he (John) saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on Him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased.’” Matthew 3:16-17. From that time on Jesus had the power to perform miracles, know what people were thinking, and other powerful things. God’s trust never wavered.

Later in his ministry at the transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus. Peter, who is there with James and John, wants to build three shelters for them but, “While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with Him I am well pleased. Listen to Him!’” Matthew 7:5.

Now let’s look at the helpers that Jesus acquired. The first two we know about were followers of John the Baptist. On consecutive days, Jesus passed by where John was teaching. The first day John said, “Look the Lamb of God” (John 1:29) and explained, at length, Jesus’ identity and purpose. The next day when John said, “Look, the Lamb of God” (John 1:36) the two men followed Jesus. They became disciples of Jesus; and later, apostles. Andrew, one of the two, invited Peter to join them. Jesus, himself, invited Philip who in turn invited Nathanael. There may have been others, not named. After the wedding in Cana, it seems everyone spent a few days back at their homes or jobs.

Not everyone Jesus teaches became followers. Jesus taught Nicodemus. He taught the Samaritan woman and the people from Sychar. Those efforts were fruitful later.

When Jesus begins calling disciples to follow him, Luke tells an interesting story. Jesus is teaching and uses Simon’s boat to get some distance from the crowd. When he finished teaching, he tells Simon to go out and catch some fish. Simon thinks it is useless but does it anyway. They catch so many that it takes two boats to bring them to shore. “When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’ ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.’ ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.” Luke 5:8-11.

Matthew adds, “Going on from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John. They were in a boat with their father Zebedee, preparing their nets. Jesus called them, ²² and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed him.” Matthew 4:21-22.

His next recorded call is to Levi son of Alphaeus, whom we know as Matthew. Levi was so pleased that he gave a great banquet with a large crowd of fellow tax collectors present. The Pharisees complained that Jesus was eating with sinners. “On hearing this Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.’ ¹³ But go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” Matthew 9:10-11.

Jesus continues healing and teaching and gaining more disciples. How many we do not know. Luke records, “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.” Luke 6:12-16.

Two phrases of these verses are worth noting. There were more than twelve disciples to pick from. I don’t know who the others were but Peter later includes Justus and Matthias as having been with them since Jesus was baptized. I expect they were two of them. It is more important to note the twelve were **disciples whom he also designated apostles**. It doesn’t matter your position, elder, minister or whatever, you must always remain a disciple.

The next named helpers came after Jesus was first anointed. “After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; ³ Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod’s household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.” Luke 8:1-3.

From this time on, as Jesus does his work, he seems to make a special effort to train his apostles. They were with Him at the Sermon on the Mount. He teaches them that His way is much superior to the Law of Moses. It is not just words to be obeyed but actions done out love for everyone, and our love for Jesus causes us to keep His commandments.

When Jesus is teaching with parables he carefully explains their meaning to his disciples. He explains why others do not understand and why he wants them to understand. He adds, “But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. ¹⁷ For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.” Matthew 13:16-17. And later He adds, “So was fulfilled what was spoken through the prophet: ‘I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things hidden since the creation of the world.’” Matthew 13:35.

The disciples also witnessed many miracles of various kinds. This was very important for the apostles because they would soon be sent out. Jesus is going everywhere, teaching, preaching and healing. The crowds are overwhelming. “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field.’” Matthew 9:37-38.

His solution is what we know today as internships. He sent his apostles on internships. It will be a good learning experience and a test to see if they are well trained. “Jesus called his twelve disciples to Him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.” Matthew 10:1. And Luke adds they were sent two by two. They were given pages of instructions. They were successful.

If the apostles had been the only ones sent out to spread the gospel, more people would believe that “clergy” are the only ones who can spread the good news, and that “lay” disciples cannot. Jesus’ next internships should have removed that idea. Knowing the success of the apostles and seeing the need for more workers, Jesus sends out seventy-two others, two by two. They went ahead of Him to every town He was about to go. He kept saying, the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. The seventy-two were successful. In the right places and with the right training it still works.

The home of Martha, her sister Mary, and their brother Lazarus was very important to Jesus. On three occasions the family is mentioned. The first time Martha wants to be a gracious hostess and Mary just wants to listen to Jesus. The second story is the raising of Lazarus from the tomb. The third is the banquet with all three present and Mary anoints Jesus. They were always helpful and extremely important to Jesus.

The story of Zacchaeus was covered in the lesson on forgiveness. Others include the owner of the upper room for the last supper, the owner of the colt Jesus used when he entered Jerusalem the last time. Simon of Cyrene was of great physical help when he carried the cross after Jesus collapsed. And thousands of people talked about what had been done for them or what they had seen done for others.

After his crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea provided Jesus with his own new tomb, and he and Nicodemus prepared Jesus’ body and buried him. When the Sabbath was over Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome, and other women went to the tomb. After being told that Jesus has risen, they fled. But Mary Magdalene told Peter and John, then went back, met Jesus and talked to him.

That same day Cleopas and his friend were walking to Emmaus. Jesus joined them. After some discussion, they stopped to eat and Cleopas recognized Jesus. Cleopas rushed back to Jerusalem and told the Eleven and those with them.

I mentioned earlier that guidance from the Father was continuous. The apostle John records, at least seven times, Jesus saying he is doing the Father’s will. The following examples should suffice. “Jesus answered, ‘My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me.’” John 7:16. “The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father living in me, who is doing his work.” John 14:10b.

And the Holy Spirit had a role. “But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” John 14:26.

When Jesus is praying to his Father he says, “I have brought you glory on earth by **finishing the work you gave me to do**. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.” John 17:4-5.

Crucifixion remains, then Jesus can say “**It is finished.**” And on the day of Pentecost, with a little imagination, we can hear Jesus say to his Father, “**It has begun.**”