

The Founding Fathers

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Preacher: Nick Louw

[0 : 00] Without looking, who could name all the twelve apostles? Not anyone. We've literally just read it like two minutes ago.

And no one can name the twelve apostles. Now, you know, not long ago, almost every Christian who came through Sunday school would have been able to name the twelve apostles.

It was one of the lists you learned, but not so much anymore. They've kind of faded into the background. And anyway, who cares? They're just some guys, right?

We're interested in Jesus, right? Not these random guys. Sure, they helped him. But we want to hear about Jesus, not the twelve apostles.

And yet, did you know, the Bible says that these twelve men will judge the nation of Israel? Did you know that the Bible says that the foundations of the new heavenly city, Jerusalem, will be named after these twelve men?

[1 : 05] Their names will be written on the foundations of the city. You see, these guys, these twelve men who you can't name, are more important than we tend to think they are.

And they are actually more important to you than you might know. And this morning we're going to find out why, who were they, what did they do, and why are they so important to us?

And the first hint that we get in this passage to their importance is the number of them. Why are there twelve apostles? Well, if you're familiar with the Bible, you'll know that twelve is an important number, right?

Anybody know why twelve is so important in the Bible? Any volunteers? The twelve tribes. Thank you. So there were twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob had twelve sons.

Now there was Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were the patriarchs of Israel. He had twelve sons, and they became the heads of the twelve tribes of Israel. Okay, now you're going, that's very interesting, but why do I care about that?

[2 : 15] What's Israel to me? I'm a South African. Why do I need to know about Israel? I wonder if you've ever wondered that, maybe. You've asked, you know, why so much talk about Israel in the Bible?

What's so special about Israel? Well, Israel was a nation unlike any other nation. And we need to understand this.

If we're going to understand the significance of the twelve here. We need to understand the significance of the nation of Israel. And they were unlike any other nation on the face of the earth. Because this nation, God intervened in history to rescue. And to actually, to take out of Egypt, you can read about this in Exodus, to take out of Egypt and to make His own.

Of all the countries in the world, God decided to take this ragtag bunch of slaves to make His own people and that they were going to be governed by His law.

[3 : 09] Where all the other nations were governed by their own laws, this nation was going to be governed by God's law. And through that, God was going to reach all other nations.

We read earlier in Exodus, He said, You're going to be a kingdom of priests. You're going to be a holy nation. Through whom all other nations will be blessed. Okay, and the way that they were going to do that, the way that they were going to be a blessing to all other nations, was that by keeping God's law, they were going to show all the other nations around them what it looks like to be a people who lives according to the way that our Creator wants us to live.

They were going to be like an example nation to the rest of the world. To show how good it is to live under God's law. Kind of like when you see that ideal kitchen in those home stores.

You go in the mall, home etc. or whatever, and they sometimes have set up this perfect kitchen.

And you go, Oh, my kitchen will never look like that, right? But, of course, the home store is telling

you, if you buy these products, your kitchen could look like this.

They're kind of setting up this perfect kitchen and wanting you to be inspired to make your kitchen look like theirs, of course, by buying their products. But that's kind of like what Israel were meant to do for the nations.

[4 : 32] They were meant to be the example nation of, if you obey God's law, this is what you could look like. And that's what God rescued them. That's what He called them to be. But, of course, as we read on in the story, we realize that didn't work out that way.

They failed to be that holy nation. They failed to be that nation that was separate and different to the other nations. Because the truth is, they weren't that different to the other nations.

They were also sinners, the same as the rest of us. They also disobeyed God's law. They couldn't keep it, same as the rest of us. So they weren't that different. They couldn't be that blessing to the world.

And so, by the time Jesus came on the scene, that original purpose of Israel, to be this blessing to the nations, to be this example to the rest of the people on the earth, that was kind of a long-lost vision.

The original purpose of those twelve tribes was kind of at the back of people's minds. It wasn't really something that was on the radar anymore because they had failed so many times.

[5 : 41] But now, Jesus comes onto the scene and He names twelve men. He takes out of His group of disciples, which were more than twelve, He takes twelve that He's selected, He names them apostles, and He takes twelve of them.

He counts twelve of them out. And He's being controversial here. He's making a point. He deliberately takes twelve. Why? Because He's making the point that He has now come to start up Israel again.

He's come to revive that old vision of this nation that would be separate to all the other nations, which would be a blessing to the world. And He's starting a new Israel out of the old.

That's what He's doing here by naming twelve disciples. It's the beginning of a new nation that will bless all the other nations. But it's going to be different this time.

Because this time it'll actually work. It'll work not because of who these men are. In fact, if we look at this list of men in Matthew 10, verse 2 to 4, this list of these twelve, there's nothing special about them.

[6 : 51] And kind of Matthew makes the point of not drawing attention to any achievements or anything like that. It wasn't because of who these men were. They were actually nobodies.

I mean, Simon, Andrew, James, John, they were just fishermen. Fishermen that Jesus, manual laborers that Jesus picked up on the beach.

Matthew, he mentions, and the guy who wrote this, he was a tax collector, despised in Jewish society. It wasn't because of who these men were that Jesus selected them to be the start of this new nation.

No, it was because of who he'd make them. Who he was planning to make them. And that's the thing. About when Jesus chooses people to be his disciples.

When Jesus chooses people to be part of what he's doing, it's not because of what they've achieved or anything about them that he chooses them. He chooses them because of what he is going to make them.

[7 : 51] And that's how he chose these guys. Because of what he was going to make them. And as we read on in the gospel, we know where it ends up. It ends up where Jesus dying on the cross. And through his death on the cross, he breaks the power of sin over his people.

We learned that last week, didn't we? That through the cross, Jesus causes people to die to the power of sin. And they are released from the slavery to sin.

And that's what he was going to do for these 12 men. And that's why he knew they could go and start this new nation. And they could succeed where Israel had failed before.

And there could be this new nation that's going to bless the world. Because it was going to be a nation inhabited by new types of people that don't have to obey sin anymore.

That's what's going to be different about this nation that Jesus is making. It's going to be full of people who don't have to obey sin anymore. They're no longer slaves to sin.

[8 : 54] And that's how they're going to have an influence over all the other nations. And here's the amazing thing about this new nation Jesus came to make. You can be part of it too.

You can be part of this new nation. Because it's a nation that doesn't have geographic borders. It's a nation that actually is over all the world. No matter who you are, you can be part of this nation. Maybe you've come in church this morning and you don't even feel that you're worthy of being here. Well, I hope you were listening to the confession earlier because none of us are worthy of being here. None of us are worthy of being part of what God is doing.

And you can be part of this new nation no matter who you are. There are no entry qualifications because it's not about who you are now. But it's about who Jesus will make you if you follow Him. And if you do, if you're a Christian, if you do follow Jesus, if you have repented and been baptized into His name, you know what that means about you? It means that you actually have a new nationality.

[10:04] You have a new nationality. You might have a passport at home. It might be green. It might be red. It might be whatever color. Probably green. And that, if you open it up, it says your nationality, it says a little nationality and it says you're South African.

But did you know that if you're a Christian, you're actually a citizen of the nation of Israel? Did you know that? Not the old Israel, not the geographic Israel, but the new Israel Jesus came to make here, starting with these 12 people.

That is your nationality if you're a Christian. And these 12 men were the beginning of that nation. In other words, they are our founding fathers. You know how, especially Americans talk about their founding fathers.

You know, and they have, they remember their founding fathers. I mean, we look at our history ourselves, the South Africans, it might be Jan van Riebeck, it might be Shaka Zulu. But you know, those aren't your founding fathers if you're a Christian.

They're somebody else's history. No. Our history, if we're Christians, starts here with these 12 men.

[11:16] They're our founding fathers. And that's how we got to see them. But now, that's who they were. Next question is, what did they do?

What was the first job of our founding fathers? That's what we see next, and it's pretty awesome. Look at verse 1 with me. Summoning His 12 disciples, He gave them authority over unclean spirits to drive them out and to heal every disease and sickness.

In other words, these 12 men are given power, power to do things, all the things Jesus had up until this point been doing.

It's the same language used of describing what the miracles Jesus had been doing before. What had Jesus been doing? Well, He had been, essentially, in His miracles, in His healing so far, He had been bringing little bits of Heaven's power to earth.

That's what Jesus was doing when He came. And He started to touch people's lives and He started to do these amazing restorations and miracles and heal people's diseases. He was bringing Heaven's power down to earth through Him to restore what is broken in this world.

[12:32] And, not just to restore little bits of brokenness, but actually to foreshadow, to be a preview of God's plan for this whole world, which is ultimate restoration.

God does not want this world to stay broken. We know this world is broken. We know we're broken. God does not want it to stay that way. And the Bible reveals God's plan to restore it. That's what's coming.

And, and Jesus gave us previews of that in His miracles. This restoration of what is broken. And that work, restoring what is broken in this world, is the work that's going to mark out this new nation that Jesus is making here, starting with these 12 men.

A nation that brings restoration to the other nations. A nation that can touch and restore what is broken in the world, to point forward to the future that God has planned for this world, and to bring people to put their hope in that.

That's what this nation was going to do. But even now, they can begin, even before that ultimate future, they can begin to clean up what is broken. That's the job Jesus gave to His apostles, to start cleaning up what is broken.

[13:48] Did you notice here, in verse 1, it says, they were given authority over unclean spirits. What does that mean?

Unclean spirits. No, that's not a reference to a dirty martini. Unclean spirits are spiritual beings who are against God's will for the world.

And yes, they exist. Many of them. The Bible talks about them a lot. There's not just human beings who are against God's will for the world. There are spiritual beings in the unseen, the spiritual realm that are against God's will for the world.

They're not all on God's side. Okay? And they're the ones who bring into this world things that are not meant to be. Things that God did not will for this world.

They're the ones who influence humans and bring what is wrong and bad into this world. And those beings exist. But you know what's cool about this passage and what we read here is that Jesus gave our founding fathers authority over these beings.

[14:59] For the first time, pretty much, humans were given real authority over spiritual beings. Think about that. Jesus gave our founding fathers, these twelve apostles, authority to stop them in their tracks, to cast them out of people's lives.

They were essentially like, I guess, a spiritual SWAT team going in and taking out the bad guys. You know how you see in movies when maybe there's a hostage situation and the normal cops can't handle it.

So they send in the SWAT team and they rock up in a black truck and they get out and they're covered and they've got these weapons and they go in and they take out the bad guys and they rescue the hostages because they have power.

Well, that's what these twelve disciples, they may not have looked like much. You know, a bunch of fishermen, old Middle Eastern clothes. They were a spiritual SWAT team. They were going in there and they were given authority to take out the bad guys and to rescue the hostages.

And that's what these disciples were doing. Humans were given authority to go in and engage in the unseen realm. Isn't that amazing? Now, I bet the spiritual beings were not too happy about that.

[16:20] You know, for hundreds of years, thousands of years, these spiritual beings had exercised authority over humans. Well, now, for the first time, thanks to Jesus, humans are beginning to strike back.

That's what's going on here. That's what this new nation, this new Israel, has been enabled by Jesus to do. To strike back at evil. To rescue people in the world from brokenness and from evil. It's an amazing thing that we're reading in these few verses, if we understand what's going on here. For the first time in history, humans are now able to strike back at evil through Jesus.

Okay, so does that mean we can do that today? Does that mean you can do that today? What they were doing then? Well, yes, it does, but not in the same way.

We need to understand a few things. We're not apostles, first of all. Okay? These twelve, you'll notice if you read carefully, in verse one they're called disciples, but in verse two they're given the name apostles, and that's a special word.

[17:32] Apostle, an apostle is someone, it's often misunderstood, especially in our communities today. An apostle was someone who was an official eyewitness of Jesus, commissioned by him personally to impart his message to others.

And so there were these twelve apostles and later Paul, and they were the apostles. But no one since has qualified for that. They were the apostles, and we're not apostles today, and we don't get apostles like this today.

And because of that, because they were the official eyewitnesses of Jesus and commissioned to impart the gospel, commissioned to impart his message, they could do things that we can't do today, especially miraculous things, just like Jesus could do.

He passed on that authority to his official eyewitnesses, and they could do these miraculous things as well that we can't. But the main reason they did these things, the main reason that they could perform these powerful signs, was actually to validate their message that they brought.

We're going to see next week, in next week's passage, that that was actually their main job. Their main job was their message. Their main job was to take this truth that Jesus gave them, and to take it, and to spread it, and to spread it across nations, which they eventually did.

[18:54] If you look into the history of where these 12 ended up, they went out, and that was their life's mission, to take this message out. And the powerful signs they could do was given to them in order to validate them as messengers to listen to.

And that's actually, their message was far more important than their miracles. Their miracles would have been great, especially if you were, you know, crippled or diseased, and they came and healed you.

But even then, if they did that, you were still going to get old, you were still going to get more diseases, you were still going to die. It was only temporary. Their miracles and their healings were only temporary.

Their message, though, well, that lasted. That had permanent effect. While their miracles could restore people temporarily, their message would restore people eternally. And that is how we continue their work today. And that's how we get to do the powerful things they did then through the message that they left us that is in our Bible.

[20 : 05] We carry their message. You see, right here, right here in their words, in the New Testament, in the Gospels, and in the letters they wrote, right here is all the power that we need to continue their work.

Right here, in their words. To continue their work. The power is here, which is, of course, to continue Jesus' work, because that's the work they were given to do, and that's the work they've given us through their words to do today.

To continue Jesus' work to bring heaven's power down to earth. We do it through this. Okay? As we read this, and I mean read it, I don't mean just take a verse out to make you feel good, and put it on your fridge.

That's where your church calendar should be. No. Actually dive into what they wrote, and study it, and go on courses that your church runs, right?

And come and sit under sermons where we can hear about these things in their context. when we read, and then when we teach, and then when we take these words and these truths into communities around us and into lives, then we get to do what the apostles did.

[21 : 24] We get to engage in the unseen realm. We get to take on the forces of evil through this. Isn't that exciting? Hmm? We get to do what the apostles did through this.

We get to rescue people from the powers of darkness. We get to undo brokenness that we see in the world around us. We get to restore what has been taken out.

We get to bring people from darkness into light all through this. That's what we're here for. And what an epic mission it is.

is, I don't want to do anything else in my life. This is the most important thing. Being part of this new nation that Jesus came to build that is going to undo brokenness, that is going to fight against the forces of evil like nothing else can do.

Why would you not want to be part of that? Why would you not want to get stuck into that? It is an amazing privilege to be involved in God's church. To have a role in the new nation Jesus came to make.

[22 : 33] And if you're a Christian, whoever you are, if you've been baptized into this new nation through faith, you have a role to play in it.

You might not think you do, but you do. The Bible says you do. You have a role to play in the new nation Jesus came to make if you're a citizen of that nation.

No matter who you are, you know, God, Jesus used this ragtag bunch. He can use you. And there's many ways to be involved in this new nation.

There's many ways to be involved and to get stuck in. We just saw earlier all these things, you know, in this guide to serving. These are all different ways that you can get stuck into what God's church is doing on earth.

No, I know. You look at them and they look pretty ordinary, right? I mean, operating the projector, operating the sound desk. Yeah, sure.

[23 : 29] Your hospitality, serving tea, those kind of things. Those look pretty ordinary, I know. But you know how we've got to see these things when they're done in the church in the context of what the church is doing?

They are ordinary tasks. Many of them are pretty boring, ordinary tasks. But they're ordinary tasks done for an extraordinary purpose. Right? And that's why you've got to ask yourself, how am I going to be involved in God's extraordinary purpose that He's given us to do?

How are you going to be involved this year? Ask yourself. How are you going to be involved in this new nation that Jesus came to form, that has a mission to do?

How are you going to be part of God's restoring work in the lives of others? Because you can be, and you do it through this. You do it through this as you bring this into the lives of the people God has put in your life, and you do it through this as you play your role in God's church, which is to take

this and to teach this in the world.

What is your role to play? What are you going to do? Ask yourself, what are you going to do this year? How are you going to get stuck here? And that is a challenge I want to leave with you, and I would normally end my sermon there.

[24 : 49] But I have one more thing to say. And I have one more thing to say to those of us who are involved already in some way in God's church, in this new nation.

Maybe you've always served in church. church. Maybe you're very used to serving in church. You just do your duty every week. There's something you do, and you get stuck into God's work.

That's great. That's awesome. But for those of us who are serving and are stuck in and are doing the work God's given us to do, there's actually a warning for us in this list of disciples.

I wonder if you noticed it. It's the last one. Let me read it to you again. Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed Jesus.

He is one of our founding fathers for a reason. Judas Iscariot is one of our founding fathers as a warning that even an apostle who exercised power to heal people and bring restoration into people's lives was himself not ultimately restored.

[26 : 10] What does that say to us? Well, I think it says that just because you're involved in church, just because you serve and do your bit and help restore others doesn't mean that you don't need to keep being restored yourself.

keep sitting under the rule of this word. Not think that you know it now. Not think that, oh, I don't need to go to church. I know it already.

No. You need to keep sitting under this word, to keep being transformed by its power and to keep doing what it says more and more and more and more.

That doesn't end. Because only by persevering in the apostles' teachings, living more and more in line with them, because none of us are living as in line with these teachings as we could.

And it's only by persevering and keeping, keeping coming to them, keeping sitting under the authority of these truths, being here every Sunday to sit under this word, it's only then that heaven's power will continue to flow into your life, continue to transform you, and then through you, God willing, to transform others out there.

[27 : 25] Let's pray that that will be true of us this year. Let's come to God together. O Lord Jesus, we thank you not only that you came to bring restoration and the beginnings of a new thing to this world, but that you empowered people, human beings, to be agents of that restoration.

Your apostles, our founding fathers, we thank you for those men. Lord, we thank you for the sacrifices that they made so that we today can know what we know.

We confess that we often neglect these men and the roles that they've actually played in our lives, that we would not know Jesus but for them.

And so we thank you for them, Lord. And we pray, Lord, that as we look at their lives and the commitment to their mission and the transformation that you wrought in them, that we would seek to be transformed in the same way and that we would carry on their work.

Help us to do that, Lord. Help us to continue their work in the world today by engaging in the unseen realm through their words, through these truths that we have in our Bible.

[28 : 43] Help us to use this to push against the powers of darkness in this world and to bring restoration to the brokenness around us. And help us, Lord, all to know how you want us to get stuck into that work this coming year.

In Jesus' name. Amen.