

Twelve Ordinary Men: Simon the Zealot

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[0 : 00] So Luke chapter 6, page 1038 or 39 if you're using the Pew Bible. Luke chapter 6, I'm reading at verse 13.

Luke 6 at verse 13. And this evening we're continuing our study of the twelve disciples of Jesus. And as we've repeatedly discussed and even discovered over the past number of weeks, these twelve disciples, they were just twelve ordinary men. They were twelve ordinary men who had been called, commissioned, and commanded to serve their extraordinary God.

They weren't rich or religious. They weren't the best or the brightest, the smartest or the sharpest, the clearest or even the cleverest. They were just like us. And that's the point that's been stressed. They were just like us with many of their flaws and their faults and their failings and all their foibles. They were just like us. But that's what makes them worth studying together.

[1 : 37] Because we can learn from their experience and we can learn from their example. And this evening we're learning from the experience and example of the tenth disciple in this list of learners.

He is Simon the Zealot. So we've gone through nine already. We have two more after this one. We're looking this evening at Simon the Zealot.

But the thing about Simon the Zealot is that like it was for Bartholomew when we considered him, and also James the son of Alphaeus whom we considered last time, there's nothing really written, there's nothing really recorded about this man Simon the Zealot.

There's not much to go on, only what we read earlier on, his name appearing in these lists of learners. There's nothing to go on. Next to nothing is written about him apart from his name in those lists of learners.

Because as we said before, these four lists of learners in the New Testament we read in Matthew 10, Mark 3. We look here in Luke chapter 6 and also Acts chapter 1.

[2 : 45] And what's interesting is that in the lists of learners, I don't know if you noticed, but Matthew and Mark, they refer to this Simon as Simon the Canaanite or Simon the Canaanite.

But in Luke's Gospel and in the book of Acts, which were both written by Dr. Luke, Simon is referred to as Simon the Zealot.

And that's all we have. We just have his name. He's Simon the Canaanite or Simon the Zealot. It's not much to go on, but I hope and pray that we can learn from the experience and the example of this man Simon the Zealot.

And so I want us to consider this disciple under two headings. Two simple headings. I didn't ask you, boys and girls, what they were. But to remember them, so just remember them anyway. Zealous for the sword and zealous for the Lord.

Zealous for the sword and zealous for the Lord. So first of all, zealous for the sword. Zealous for the sword. You know, when we look at this list of learners, we can see that many of them have someone who shares their name.

[3 : 56] Because there are two Simons, there are two Jameses, and there are also two Judases. There's Simon, whom Jesus named Peter, and there's also Simon the Zealot.

There's James, the son of Alphaeus, and James, the son of Zebedee. And there's Judas. Judas, the son of James, and we'll be considering him next week. And then the following week after that, Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus.

And when we look at these lists of learners, we can see that many of them, they have someone who shares the same name as them. But when it comes to the name Simon, boys and girls, when it comes to the name Simon, Simon was a very common name in ancient Israel.

Much like, sorry, no offense, but the name Donald is quite a common name in Lewis. But even though there are two Simons mentioned in this list, there are nine Simons mentioned in the New

Testament.

There are nine Simons mentioned in the New Testament. There is, as we know, the well-known apostle Simon, who was named Peter. There's also this Simon, Simon the Zealot.

[5 : 07] Jesus, as you know, he had four brothers, and one of them was called Simon. The father of Judas Iscariot, he was also called Simon. There's also Simon the Pharisee.

He was the one who learned the lesson about forgiveness from Jesus. There's Simon the leper. He was the one who witnessed Jesus being anointed with the alabaster box of precious ointment.

Then there's Simon of Cyrene. He was the man who carried the cross for Jesus all the way to the crucifixion site of Calvary. Then there's Simon the sorcerer in the book of Acts.

He thought that he could buy salvation with money. And then there's lastly Simon the Tanner.

Simon the Tanner was the man who lived in Joppa by the sea, and he opened his home to all the apostles.

There are nine Simons mentioned in the New Testament. But of course, our focus this evening is Simon the Zealot, or Simon the Canaanite, who, although he shared the same name as one of the most well-known apostles, Simon Peter, this Simon, Simon the Zealot, he had a nickname that stuck.

[6 : 17] Simon the Zealot had a nickname that stuck. And as you know, there are some nicknames that really do stick. I'm sure there are some very strange nicknames. You hear them all the time.

And they're nicknames that were adopted, they were applied way back in their childhood, and yet they've stuck all the way through their life. And they're still called by that nickname all the time.

I'm not going to start naming names this evening. But we see it in our culture. We see it in our own context. And we've seen that with many of these 12 ordinary men. Because Simon, the first Simon, he was nicknamed by Jesus as Peter.

James and John, they were nicknamed Boanerges, the sons of thunder. Bartholomew, that was his nickname. But it was also his surname. He was called by his surname.

Matthew was Levi. He was nicknamed Levi the Levite. Thomas was nicknamed Didymus, the twin. And then there's this Simon here. Simon, who was nicknamed the Zealot.

[7 : 21] He was nicknamed the Zealot. Which out of all the nicknames given to these 12 ordinary men, his nickname stuck out.

His nickname stood out. Because you could say that it was probably the least flattering and the least favorable nickname of them all.

He was Simon the Zealot. Simon the Zealot. Now, as we said, Matthew and Mark, they refer to Simon. This Simon is Simon the Canaanite. Or Simon the Canaanite.

And from that, some have come to the assumption that this Simon was Simon the Canaanite because he was from Cana in Galilee. As you know, that's where Jesus performed his first miracle of turning water into wine at the wedding of Cana in Galilee.

And some people, therefore, have come to the assumption, they've made the conclusion, there's no grounding for it, but they made the conclusion that Simon, this Simon, was present at the wedding of Cana in Galilee.

[8 : 26] And that's where he first saw Jesus. That's where he first heard about Jesus. That's where he first believed upon Jesus because he witnessed the water being turned into wine. So that's why they call him Simon the Canaanite.

Well, that's why they think he was called that. Other people think, well, as it is in the authorized version, if you're using it, it'll be Simon the Canaanite. And some assume that Simon wasn't actually from the land of Canaan, Galilee, but from the land of Canaan, which, as you know, Canaan was the promised land of Israel.

But both assumptions, they are just that. They're assumptions. The most probable possibility for the identity of this Simon is that Matthew and Mark's use of the word Canaanite, or Canaanite, as it is in the AV.

It wasn't that Simon was from Cana in Galilee, or that he was from the land of Canaan, which he was, but that the Hebrew word, boys and girls, the Hebrew word, listen, Hebrew word Cana means to be zealous.

The Hebrew word Cana means to be zealous. Therefore, Simon the Canaanite should actually just be translated as Simon the Zealous One.

[9 : 46] Simon the Zealous One. Or as Luke has it, Simon the Zealot. So, in fact, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and the book of Acts, they're all saying the same name.

And let's not misunderstand who this person is. He is the same person. He is Simon the Zealot. And he's called Simon the Zealot by all of these gospel writers.

But as we said, out of all the nicknames given to these twelve ordinary men, this is the nickname that stuck. This is the one that stood out, and it was the least flattering, the least favorable among them all.

And Simon the Zealot, his nickname was the least flattering and the least favorable because, well, you know, before being chosen and called and commissioned to be a disciple of Jesus, Simon the Zealot, he was associated with, he was attributed to this political party called the Zealots.

Hence, the nickname that stuck and stood out, Simon the Zealot. But it's not a nickname you would want to have as a Christian. It really isn't a nickname you would want to have as a Christian.

[10 : 59] Because the Zealots, the Zealots were this far right-wing political party within the nation of Israel. You could say that the Zealots, they were this nationalist party.

They were always being driven, and they were always determined to implement national independence. They were always about independence as a nation. Because at the time, the Roman Empire was emerging.

It was expanding throughout Europe. And like many of these European nations, the Romans, they had overtaken, they'd overruled, and they even occupied this nation, the nation of Israel.

Which, as you can imagine, for a far-right political party that always wanted independence, that didn't sit well with the Zealots. They didn't like the Romans.

In fact, the Zealots, they hated the Romans. They hated the Romans so much that they would often exhort and encourage the people of Israel to rise up and revolt and rebel against the Romans who were occupying their land.

[12 : 07] They would say that this is God's land. This is the promised land. This is our land. It's not the Romans' land. And the Zealots, they believed that they were patriots for their country.

But in reality, they were terrorists. They were this extremist political party who were ready and willing not only to die for what they believed in, but to kill for what they believed in.

One commentator said that the Zealots were like the Pharisees. They were like the Pharisees because they interpreted the law of God literally.

But unlike the Pharisees, who often compromised for political gain with the Romans, the Zealots were fiercely militant. They were violent.

They were outlaws who believed that only God had the right to reign and rule over the land of Israel.

[13 : 10] Therefore, the Zealots believed that invasion and infiltration of the Romans into the land of Israel, that was a just cause for jihad. They had a just reason for holy war, to fight back against the invasion of the Romans.

And throughout the years, you look at history, throughout the years, there was all these revolts, all these rebellions, all these revolutions against the Romans. In fact, not long after the birth of Jesus, just in the year 6 AD, there was this violent revolt and rebellion against the Romans because of a census tax.

Just like any government, they imposed taxes upon the people. But the Zealots believed that paying tax or paying any tribute to a pagan king, that was treason against God.

That was treason against the Lord. And there was one Zealot who's called Judas the Galilean. He's actually mentioned in Acts chapter 5. Judas the Galilean was someone who organized an opportunity to revolt and to rebel against the Romans.

He waged war against the Romans. And of course, as you can imagine, well, it's the Roman Empire. They quickly crushed the rebellion. And they killed Judas the Galilean.

[14 : 31] And they crucified all his sons. And, you know, after that, it was after that moment in the beginning of the first century, the Zealots went underground.

They went into hiding. And in many ways, they became this secret terrorist group. And they were a terrorist group that would select their victims. They formed a group of what you would call secret assassins.

They were secret assassins. And boys and girls, they were called the Sakari, which means the dagger men. They were the Sakari, the dagger men.

And what was really, I suppose, fascinating, but yet frightening about them, they would secretly go about with curved daggers inside their cloaks.

And they would walk up to their victim and then just stab them in the back. And, you know, I was thinking, I wonder if that's where the phrase cloak and dagger actually originated from, where these Zealots, they would secretly walk around with their daggers, stabbing people in the back.

[15:42] And yet the Zealots, they were convinced that they were doing God's will and God's work. They were convinced that they were faithful to the Lord and serving the Lord and what they were doing by assassinating every Roman soldier and every political leader who stood in their way of fulfilling what they believed was their God-given mandate.

And you could say that the Zealots, they were powerful people. They were passionate people. They were passionate in their political views for the nation of Israel. And, you know, I don't think we should undermine or underestimate how important and how influential the Zealots actually were as a national party in Israel.

Because even when you step back and you consider some of the conversations that were had and written in the Gospels, you hear the influence. You can hear the impact of the Zealots upon the minds of the Israelites.

Because as a Jewish national party, the Zealots, they looked for and they longed for the Messiah to come. They were waiting, just like all the Jews were waiting, waiting for the Messiah to come. But their view of the Messiah was an earthly view. They wanted a king to overthrow the Romans and restore the kingdom to Israel.

[17:01] They wanted their nation back to them. And that's why in Mark chapter 10, James and John, when they discover that Jesus is the Messiah, they say to Jesus, grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.

Now, they're not talking about heaven. They're not thinking about the kingdom of heaven. No, James and John are thinking of political power. They're thinking of political position within the kingdom of Israel.

They want to sit on either side when Jesus is crowned king in Israel and when Jesus kicks out the Romans out of the land of Israel.

And so you can see that there's this mindset from the Zealots that infiltrated and impacted even the disciples. The same was through immediately after the resurrection of Jesus. In Acts chapter 1, we should have read it, I should have read it earlier to you.

The disciples, immediately in Acts chapter 1, Jesus has been resurrected. He's about to ascend. And the first question the disciples ask Jesus, Lord, is it at this time that you're going to restore the kingdom to Israel?

[18:19] The first thing they ask is, Lord, when are you taking your throne in Israel? Their mind was on earthly things. They were focused on the here and now and not what is to come.

They were focused on this world and not the kingdom of heaven. And you know, you can see the impact, you can see the influence that these Zealots had and their viewpoint.

That they were impacting the nation of Israel as a whole, even to the point that the disciples were still thinking about an earthly kingdom rather than a heavenly one.

But you know, despite the impact and despite the influence of the Zealots upon the nation of Israel, you come back to this man, Simon. And there was a time in Simon's life, this is what I love about it, there was a time in Simon's life when the gospel of grace had a greater impact and a greater influence upon this man's life.

He had been influenced and impacted by this political party. He was far right as you could go. And yet, the gospel of God's grace had a greater impact and a greater influence upon his heart and his life.

[19:43] Where he went from being zealous for the sword to zealous for the Lord, which is what I want to think about secondly. He goes from being zealous for the sword to being zealous for the Lord.

He's zealous for the Lord. Zealous for the Lord. You know, as we consider these twelve ordinary men, you know, you look at these lists and you see that they're chosen, they're called, they're commissioned to be disciples of Jesus.

And they were chosen, called, and commissioned not for their expertise in evangelism. They were just fishermen, tax collectors, zealots. They were chosen, called, and commissioned not for their

prowess in planting churches in places where the gospel had never been or for their organization skills or their oratory skills or even their theological thinking.

The truth is, for the most part, these disciples, as we've seen, they were confused about the message. Even when Jesus was resurrected, they were still confused about the message. They were contradictory in the mission.

They were clouded in their mindset. More than that, they were a completely mixed bag of men. They were a completely mixed bag of men. They were all so different, so diverse, so dissimilar.

[21 : 04] You look at them and you think, well, they're spanning the whole spectrum of society. You've got, you know, you go to one end of the spectrum and you have one man named Simon who's a former fisherman on the Sea of Galilee.

Spent his life out at sea and Jesus calls him and commissions him and commands him to be a disciple. Then at the other end of the spectrum, you have this other man called Simon.

The same name, yet they're completely different. He's this former assassin. He has a murder list that is as long as your arm.

He belongs to this far right winged nationalist party. And you look at both Simons and you think to yourself, you couldn't make this up. You couldn't make this up.

You look at the list of learners and we see that both Simon, Simon Peter and Simon the Zealot, they're trophies of grace. That's what I love about it.

[22 : 05] They're trophies of grace. These men were evidence to the goodness and the grace and the glory of God in the salvation of sinners.

They were trophies of grace. Whether Simon the fisherman or Simon the zealot, they were trophies of grace. But as you know, for Simon the zealot, he was this man who had this colorful and checkered past.

He was known and nicknamed Simon the zealot. Everybody knew him by his nickname. The name that stuck out, the name that stood out even after he became a Christian.

Even after he had been chosen and called and commissioned to be a disciple of Jesus. He had this checkered past. He had a colorful past.

Because in his former life, this Simon, he was a sacred assassin. He participated in acts of terror.

He incited revolts and rebellions and revolutions against the Roman army who were occupying the nation.

[23 : 09] Simon the zealot had this colorful and checkered past. And yet, he was a trophy of grace. He was a trophy of grace.

You know, he reminds me, I was reading about Simon the zealot and it reminded me of the murderer in prison. Maybe you've heard the story before. I can't remember his name. But he was a murderer in prison who was once given a copy of the New Testament from the Bible Society.

And at first, he refused to take the New Testament. He said he didn't want it, didn't want anything to do with it. But the man insisted from the Bible Society, he insisted, take the New Testament.

And he said, well, if I take it, I'm going to roll up the pages of the Bible and use them for cigarettes. But all he was told by the Bible Society was, well, if you do that, at least read the page of the New Testament before you smoke it.

And years later, when this prisoner, this murderer, was telling his testimony about how he had come to faith in Jesus Christ, how he had become a trophy of grace, he testified by saying, I smoked Matthew's gospel.

[24 : 21] I smoked Mark's gospel. I smoked Luke's gospel. And I started smoking John's gospel. But when I got to John 3, 16, I couldn't smoke anymore because my life was changed from that moment.

And you know, it's amazing. He was a trophy of grace. And you know, it ought to remind us and reassure us that there is absolutely no one who is here this evening or who is watching at home online who is beyond the grasp of the grace of God.

Absolutely no one. That he is not able to pull and pluck as a brand from the burning. There's absolutely no one. For whom Jesus cannot save because he can save to the uttermost.

And you know, Simon the Zealot, he's a reminder of that. He's able to save you, my friend, just as he's able to save me. Simon the Zealot is a living example and living evidence of the goodness and the grace and the glory of God in the salvation of sinners.

So it should remind you this evening that if you're out of Christ, you're not too far gone. You're not beyond the pale.

[25 : 38] You're not unreachable. You are not rejected because the goodness and the grace and the glory of God is able to reach you as it was able to reach me, as it was able to reach Simon the Zealot.

And you know, what I love about these twelve ordinary men is that Jesus chose and he called and he commissioned these men. And when you look at them, when you look at who these men were and what these men once were, you look at the list and you see Simon the Zealot.

A few names before him is Matthew the tax collector. And like many of the Jews in Israel, the Zealots, they hated tax collectors. They worked for the Roman regime.

Tax collectors were traitors. They were turncoats. They were deserters. They were defectors. They were the most despised and disowned people in Israel. They were the lowest of the low. Everyone hated the tax collectors.

They were on the same par and page as prostitutes. And you know, Matthew was the kind of guy that Simon would have stabbed in the back. Matthew was the kind of guy that Simon the Zealot would have gone up behind him with his dagger in his cloak and shoved it through him and attacked him and assassinated him.

[26 : 58] And yet, you read it. Read it, my friend, by God's grace. They're now disciples of Jesus Christ. They were enemies in the world.

They would have hated one another in the world. But when they came to Christ, they were brothers. Brothers in Christ. They had the same heavenly Father.

They were one in Christ. And you know, I love this because it reminds us and reassures us and reaffirms to us that the gospel of God's grace is able to break down barriers and cross every culture because when it comes to the gospel of God's grace, my friend, it is for everyone.

No one is exempt. No one is exempt. The offer of the gospel is free and it's full. It's for everyone, for whosoever.

And you know, it doesn't matter if we have different backgrounds or different baggage or different upbringings or different understandings or different influences and different impacts upon our lives.

[28 : 11] We're all so different. Even everyone here tonight is all so different. But none of that matters because when the gospel of God's grace lays hold of us, we are reminded that we are all one in Christ Jesus.

We are all one in Christ Jesus. And that's the beauty of what God's grace does.

So my friend, are you part of this? Are you a disciple of Jesus? Are you one of the Lord's? You know, that's why Simon went from being zealous for the sword to being zealous for the Lord because he was following in the footsteps of Jesus.

Simon the zealot went from being zealous for the sword to being zealous for the Lord because he was following in the footsteps of Jesus.

And with this, we'll conclude this evening. Simon was following in the footsteps of Jesus because Jesus reveals, he's revealed to us in the Bible as the one who is zealous for the Lord.

[29 : 27] Jesus is revealed to us in the Bible as one who is zealous for the Lord. When Isaiah prophesied about the Messiah 700 years before Jesus was born, this is what he said.

Words that we often read at Christmastime. For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given, the government shall be upon his shoulders, his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end. On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and judgment from this time forth and forever.

And then you ask the question, well, how will it happen? And we're told the zeal of the Lord, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

The Lord was zealous. We also sang in Psalm 69, a very messianic psalm, as we said. It depicts and describes the life and ministry of Jesus at different points. And in Psalm 69, we read and we sang, the zeal for your house has consumed me.

[30 : 45] The zeal for your house has consumed me. which is then explained and emphasized in John chapter 2 when Jesus is overturning the tables of the money changers and he's driving them out of the temple and he's saying to them all, my house shall be called a house of prayer, but you

have made it a den of thieves.

And we read then that the disciples remembered something from Psalm 69. They remembered what we were singing. They remembered what it says there, that the zeal of the Lord will consume me.

The zeal for your house will consume me. You know, my friend, Simon the zealot, he went from being zealous for the sword to being zealous for the Lord.

And he was zealous for the Lord because he was following in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus was full of zeal. Full of zeal.

Passionate for his father. Passionate for his father's house. Passionate for his father's mission. And Simon the zealot was following in the footsteps of Jesus.

[31 : 54] And you know, we have to ask ourselves as disciples. We have to ask ourselves as disciples. Are we zealous for the Lord? If Jesus was zealous for his father and his father's house and his father's mission, if Jesus said to his own mother, I must be about my father's business, we have to ask ourselves, are we zealous for the Lord?

Are we zealous for following in the footsteps of Jesus? Are we committed in our Christianity? Are we passionate in our prayer life and our prayer meeting attendance?

Are we determined in our discipleship? Are we enthusiastic in our evangelism? Are we zealous for the Lord and the Lord's house and the Lord's day and the Lord's cause and the Lord's people?

Not a zeal that lacks wisdom and winsomeness, but a zeal, my friend, that has Jesus first and foremost. For Jesus must be first and foremost.

Do I look at Jesus and I think, well, that's my example. If the zeal of the Lord consumed him, then the zeal of the Lord must consume me.

[33 : 10] I must be zealous for the Lord and zealous for his cause and zealous for his people. So, my friend, I want to ask you as I ask myself, are you zealous?

Are we zealous for the Lord? Do we have this zeal where we are focused and fixated upon Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone?

And if we don't, then pray that we would. Pray that we would. Because that's what this man, Simon the Zeal ought to challenge and confront us with this evening.

That we're zealous for the Lord by following in the footsteps of Jesus. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we marvel at thy word, that it is living and it is active.

[34 : 14] And Lord, as we sit under it, we pray that thou wouldest bless it to us, that it would find lodgment in our heart, and that it would spur up within us and stir up within us that desire, that zeal, that we might be consumed by the Lord, consumed with his cause, consumed realizing that we need to focus and fixate ourselves with Jesus.

O Lord, forgive us when we are often sidetracked. Forgive us, Lord, when we focus upon ourselves and not upon our Savior. And help us, we pray, as we begin a new week to realize that it is a new opportunity, a new opportunity to serve Jesus wherever he has put us, wherever he places us, that we would do it for his glory and the furtherance of his kingdom, being assured that he promises that he will go with us every step of the way, that he will never leave us and he will never forsake us.

Lord, we thank thee for thy grace and that we would continue to realize that it is a gift, the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast, or that we would all seek the grace of God in Christ, knowing that while we seek him, that we may seek him while he is to be found and call upon him while he is near.

Do us good, then we pray, go before us, take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening.

We're going to sing in Psalm 119 in the Sing Psalms version on page 165. Psalm 119.

[36 : 02] Page 165. We're singing from verse 137 down to the verse marked 144.

Psalm 119, as you know, it's a psalm that emphasizes God's word, the importance and the priority that God's word should have in our lives. And that's what we see here.

The psalmist talks about zeal, the zeal that consumes, and it enables him not to forget God's word. Oh Lord, you are the righteous one.

The statutes that you give are just. You lay down laws of righteousness entirely worthy of our trust. my zeal consumes and wears me out because my foes forget your word.

Your promises are tried and proved and I, your servant, love them, Lord. And so we'll sing on down to the verse marked 144 of Psalm 119.

[37 : 01] And we'll stand to sing if you're able to God's praise. O Lord, you are the righteous one.

The statutes that you give are just. You lay down laws of righteousness. entirely worthy of our trust.

My zeal consumes and wears me out because my foes forget your word.

Your promises are tried and proved and I, your servant, love them, Lord.

[38 : 21] Though I am lowly and despised, your precepts, I do not forget.

Eternal is your righteousness. true is the law that you have said.

Distress and trouble press me down, but your commands are my delight.

are my delight. Grant wisdom so that I may live.

Your statutes are forever right. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore.

[39 : 46] Amen.