



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

James, Thaddaeus & Simon:
“The Who?”

FOLLOW ME:
THE STORY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Mark 3:13–19

Tim Badal | August 6, 2023



It's a pleasure to have each and every one of you with us this morning. I want you to turn in your Bibles to Mark 3, as we finish our series titled “Follow Me.” Over the summer, we have invested our time and attention on the 12 disciples Jesus called into His ministry. We have learned from these men the incredible excitement they no doubt had as they followed Jesus, hearing His teachings and watching His way of life. We are reminded that we too have been offered this invitation to follow Jesus. Our question is, how do we do this?

We have learned the good, the bad and sometimes even the ugly of what it means to follow or not follow Jesus. We've hopefully learned from these men ways we can emulate their good examples, as well as learned from the bad ones to be sure we're eliminating those things from our lives.

I want to thank a few of the other pastors who have filled this pulpit over the summer: Pastor Phil, Pastor Steve, Pastor Bill, and Pastor Josh. This has allowed Amanda and me to visit each of our campuses and open God's Word with them. I'm here to tell you, as you'll experience tonight at Village Fest, that the Spirit of almighty God is alive and well at each of our campuses. God is up to great things. I'm really excited about the future, not only of God's kingdom work, but also for Village Bible Church in the days to come. My visits to the other campuses have only increased that sense of excitement.

Now let's close out this series by focusing on these last three disciples. The reason why we can take care of three disciples in one week is that the Bible records very little about them. I want to be careful not to fill in the gaps, but simply to take what we have in Scripture and introduce them to you. These are obscure men, so we're inclined to say, “Who are they?” Then I want to apply three lessons I think are important, not only from their lives, but also from our study together.

So let's look at Mark 3:13-19:

¹³ And [Jesus] went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. ¹⁴ And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach ¹⁵ and have authority to cast out demons. ¹⁶ He appointed the twelve: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); ¹⁷ James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James (to whom he gave the name Boanerges, that is, Sons of Thunder); ¹⁸ Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, ¹⁹ and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

As we close out this series, I pray that it will serve as an encouragement to a certain group of people within our church. We have spent a lot of time talking about those who are in the spotlight, those who have in many ways leadership gifts, the ones who speak up, the ones who seem to be part of all the action. This morning I want to bring an encouraging word to those who are behind the scenes, those who are never on the stage, those who are never under the lights, those whose names won't show up on websites or in ministry guides, but who faithfully serve and walk with our Lord in obscurity.

This morning we are given three names of men whom we know very little about. But I can tell you this: they loved Jesus and Jesus loved them. He also gave them great opportunities to serve. While we don't know lots of details, we do know Jesus never does things badly. We also know He used these men to the full extent of their abilities and as a result we have been blessed. You see, the Bible is full of storylines of people who are changed and transformed by His gospel. We have these Twelve, to whom we've given our attention in recent weeks. The Gospel writings also contain stories of the lives of women who were present during Christ's ministry, or who gathered at the foot of His cross when no men except John could be found. Women were among the first people to know about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You might ask, "Why don't we talk about them?" Actually, the preachers at Village have agreed to look at their lives next summer. We're going to present a second installment of the "Follow Me" series, looking at the lives of the women who were closest to Jesus.

We're also told about a group of 72 individuals who were sent out to preach the Kingdom of God, to cast out demons and do all kinds of amazing signs and wonders. Then in Acts 1, after the ascension of Jesus, there were 120 people waiting in the upper room for the promised Holy Spirit. Don't ever get the idea that God only used the Twelve. God is in the business of using people from all backgrounds, from all places, with different personalities, gifts and abilities. He wants to use you to change the world by transforming you and me as His followers.

So the storyline of the Gospels is filled with nameless individuals who get no credit for anything, who get no opportunity to shine under the lights, but their lives played a part. The satire internet publication "The Babylon Bee" had some fun with this. They claimed to know the storyline of "Twelve Lesser-Known Disciples Who Didn't Make it into the Bible." Here's part of their list:

- First, there is Barry the Sound Guy who lugged incredible amounts of sound equipment all over Israel for Jesus. As always, like our sound guys here, he got zero credit for it. But his reward was great in heaven.
- Then there's Evan the Bass Player in Jesus' ministry. He was notorious for feuding with Barry the Sound Guy about sound levels. The only people laughing now are the sound guys.
- James the Even Lesser who was really a pretty good guy. He just didn't hang out with the other Jameses. As we'll learn, James was a pretty popular name in the day.
- Then there's Jerry the Moderately Zealous. Unlike Simon the Zealot, he was only moderately zealous, a somewhat regular service attendee. He volunteered on occasions. His name might have been Garry, but the translation is difficult—and no one really cares.
- There's Kevin the Cross Fit Guy who never really shut up about it and eventually got kicked out for being in a cult. That may be a little too close to home for some of you.
- And Judas, not the bad one. We're going to be talking about him today. He's an incredibly kind and loyal guy, just with a terrible name that was eventually changed to Leroy.
- We have Lonnie who's known for having too much wine at the wedding in Cana and breaking out "The Worm" on the dance floor. If you do that at a wedding, Jesus is going to set you aside for a little while.
- Todd the Total Screw-Up. Though he wasn't named Todd, he stupidly told Jesus to send the children away, and his idiocy has been recorded for all posterity. Good one, Todd.
- Then there's Steve. What more can we really say about Steve? We're just going to leave him there.
- And of course Clarence the Social Media Guy for the disciples. He managed many ups and downs in followers, but despite his efforts, the disciples eventually all got kicked off Twitter. How sad.

So there's a little fun to tell us that God uses all kinds of people in many, many different ways.

Today we have the difficult job of trying to build a sermon around three very obscure disciples. My hope and prayer is that what we have for you today will be of great benefit and blessing to you. So let's jump into it. First, we need to know who these guys are. We're introduced to them in the list in Mark 3.

James the son of Alphaeus

The only thing we know about this James is his name and his father's name. We don't know anything else in Mark 3. The Bible never has him speaking and never tells us anything he specifically did. The only other thing we're given about this man is found in Mark 15:40. The setting is the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Here Mark gives us another list of people: *"There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome."*

Now we know James' mother's name and that she was obviously also a disciple of Jesus. We also know he had a brother whose name also begins with 'J'—Joses. Must be one of those families where all the kids' names start with the same letter. That's all we know about this guy—except that he was 'younger.' The Greek word is *micros*, which means 'little,' but the ESV translates as younger. It could mean he was a younger disciple, a younger brother, or it could mean that he was small in stature and thus was given a nickname of being a micro-version, if you will.

We're told that he is the son of Alphaeus, another person we don't know anything about, unless he's the same Alphaeus who is the father of Matthew, the tax collector. That leaves us asking are Matthew and James brothers? But there's nothing that really connects them. With Peter and Andrew, or James and John, we're given that connection. So it was the pattern for disciples to be identified as brothers, but Matthew and James were never connected in this way. Also, the name Alphaeus was a common name. Or, like some of you, it could be that the brothers didn't like hanging around with each other, even when in a small group of people. We just don't know.

So we know the names of his parents. We know his mother was a follower of Jesus. We know he had a sibling. This is all we can be sure of. But church tradition also tells us that this man went to Syria, Iraq and Iran to preach the gospel after Jesus ascended to heaven. Some say he was beaten to death; others say he was stoned to death; some even say he was crucified. Again, we really do not know.

So that's James the son of Alphaeus.

Thaddaeus

How about Thaddaeus who was also called Judas Lebbaeus—three names for the same man. If you think understanding the disciples is a problem, this is part of the reason why. These guys had lots of different names. Jerome, the early church father, called him Trininominous, the man with three names. That just created another name for him. So why does he have three names? There are a couple ideas.

First, none of the names are any good. So maybe he didn't like the name he was given. After all, the first name was Judas, which was a great name that means 'praise.' It made a reference to the kingdom of Judea and was a popular name in that day. So why not keep that name? Every time the Bible talks about him as Judas, there is also the caveat, "not the one who betrayed Jesus." It might have been that his name had "become mud." That term comes from our U.S. history and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. The phrase, "your name is mud" comes from a doctor who had the opportunity—which I'm sure he wished he didn't have—to set the broken leg of Lincoln's assassin, John Wilkes Booth. Remember, John Wilkes Booth jumped out of the balcony at Ford's Theater, onto the stage, yelling, "*Sic semper tyrannis*." As a result he needed to have his leg fixed. He went to the house of Samuel Mudd, a doctor. Doctors have the job of taking care of anyone who's hurting without question, so in the middle of the night he set the leg of John Wilkes Booth.

Now, some say that Mudd didn't know who Booth was, but as word got out that this doctor fixed the leg of the greatest criminal of the day, his name became mud. He even had to close his practice because his name had become mud. His name became associated with a devious person and a devious act.

The name Judas had no doubt become mud, so any mention of this man in any of the lists in the Gospels had to include a disclaimer. I wonder if later in his ministry, when he was telling people about all the powerful miracles Jesus did, someone would ask, "If Jesus was so great and so life-changing, why would one of your own betray Him? And by the way, was that you?" "I'm not him. That's another Judas." So maybe he changed his name for that reason.

So his other name was Thaddaeus, which really wasn't a much better name. In Hebrew it literally means "breast child," or "one who suckles." Think about being on the playground with that name; you could get beat up for a name like that. Most scholars believe it might have been a derogatory name he was given as a kid, because he was a "mama's boy." And maybe even as an adult he was still too dependent on his mother. We don't know. But it wasn't an especially empowering name for a young man.

Then there was another name he used that's recorded in Scripture, Lebbaeus. This literally means "heart child," and it speaks to one who is more emotional or tender-hearted. Again, we know nothing about Thaddeaus, so we're speculating about his name.

Thankfully, we don't just have his name recorded in Scripture, we also have some words from him. Turn to John 14. This is the only time one of these three men speaks and the only line we have from Thaddaeus/Judas/Lebbaeus. They were in the upper room where Jesus was telling the disciples He was going to prepare a place for them. He had also just told them, "I am the way, the truth and the life." Then He spoke about the promised Holy Spirit. Let's begin in verse 20:

²⁰ In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹ Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

In other words, Jesus is saying that for the person who obeys God and who follows His commandments, Jesus will live with him, deeply relate with him and make Himself known to him. So listen now to what Thaddeaus asked Jesus. Notice the parentheses—not that guy!

²² Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?"

I want you to see two things here. One, Judas puts himself into that group of people who obeys His commands and who loves Jesus. Jesus doesn't interrupt and say, "What are you talking about? You're not doing this." So we can surmise from His response that Thaddaeus/Judas/Lebbaeus is a guy who longs to experience Jesus in His fullness. Not only is he hungry for that for himself, he's hungry for that for others. "Will it be that only we, the Twelve, get to experience this intimate relationship with You? Or is this available to all the world?"

Here is Jesus' response:

²³ Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

Judas/Thaddaeus/Lebbaeus really longs for the whole world to experience the same relationship he's experiencing. What a great testimony from an obscure man! He loves being one with the Lord and longs for everyone else to follow him in that relationship. This should be our heart's cry as well; that we would love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and that we would love our neighbor so much that we would introduce them to Jesus.

The details of his later life are very obscure. There's one storyline that speaks of a king in Syria who got very sick so people looked far and wide for a physician who could help him. According to church tradition, Thaddaeus was somehow brought before the king and able to miraculously heal him. As a result, a great revival broke out in the nation of Syria. Again, we don't know the veracity of that story, because there are differing stories. It's said by one church historian that he was imprisoned and later beaten to death with a club, which confirms his faithful devotion to Jesus and also his great courage.

Simon

Our third guy is Simon, which of course makes him the second Simon in the group. We're familiar with Simon Peter, but Mark uses the name Peter exclusively for him. Again, we know very little about this Simon. We know nothing about his lineage or his upbringing. The only truth we know is the Bible calls him a Zealot. In Mark 3:18, it says he was a Cananaean. We might surmise that he was from Cana of Galilee, from the land of Canaan. But that's not what it means at all. In fact, the word Cananaean means "one who is zealous." We don't really know where he's from, but what we do know is that he was zealous. That could speak simply of his passion, fire and personality. While that may be true, it's more likely to refer to the group he associated with.

According to the Jewish historian Josephus there were four main Jewish groups at the time of Christ.

First, there were the **Pharisees**. Everybody knows about the Pharisees. They were the religious leaders and the conservatives in that day. They were the men who believed that intimacy with God began and ended with your relationship with the Law. This was not only the Law recorded in the Torah, but also the laws that were written in the Talmud, which were the rabbinical writings in that day. There was a whole set of rules and regulations that were outside the Scriptures, but which were required for anyone who wanted a healthy relationship with God. Essentially these requirements separated a person from the world. Most Jewish people followed these teachings.

Then there were the **Sadducees**. They were a select group of rich liberals who did not believe in the supernatural, nor did they believe in the resurrection of the dead. These people saw the writings of Moses and the prophets to be morally symbolic, more like proverbs than actual commands. So like the liberals of our day who allegorize the teachings of Jesus, turning them into little more than proverbs, they were very selective regarding what they would obey in the Law. They didn't see the Law as a collection of dos and don'ts, but more like just good principles for life. They were not known to be a passionate group of people.

The third group were the **Essenes**. This group is never mentioned in Scripture, but they're written about in other ancient writings. The best way to envision these people is to compare them to monks. They were deeply religious and wanted to have a close walk with God. They believed this required them to separate themselves from all the encumbrances of secular, commercial life and other connections with the world. So the Essenes moved to isolated areas to live in ancient monasteries or communes.

Finally, there was a group known as the **Zealots**. They were founded by Judas of Galilee—yet another Judas—and Zadok the Pharisee. Josephus noted that the Zealots agreed with the Pharisees on everything, but they were especially focused on the idea of liberty, saying God was to be their only ruler and Lord. So they fell in line with the conservatives of the day. But whereas the Pharisees allowed people to follow and obey God and still remain under the rule of Herod, Rome and the Caesars, the Zealots did not agree. They believed God created them as a nation, He was their only King, so they would only serve Him. They would only pay taxes to God. They would only serve in God's military. They had nothing to do with outside authorities. Some of Jesus' teachings would have disturbed the Zealots, especially things like, "Render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." Or the time He told Pilate, "My Kingdom is not of this world." They would have had issues with pretty much the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount. So they weren't really fans of Jesus, yet here we have a disciple who was a Zealot.

Let us be reminded that Jesus was traded for a Zealot on Good Friday. When Pilate asked the crowd what to do with Jesus, they yelled, "Crucify Him!" Pilate then brought up the fact that every year when they celebrated Passover, amnesty would be given to one Jewish prisoner. But they said, "Crucify Jesus and give us Barabbas." Barabbas, the revolutionary Zealot, was one of the patriots of their day who sought to break the Jews free from the rule of Rome. Their goal was a political one. They believed the greatest answers to their problems could be addressed politically, through revolutionary means.

Before we go further, I think there's a lesson for us today. It's altogether easy for us as Christians to become Zealots, especially in the political arena. I'm as political as anyone else and I love many aspects of our government, but if we are known to be more zealous about political stances than we are our spiritual stances, then something's wrong. If we're not careful, we can start to think Jesus isn't the answer, Washington is. Now, we live in a democracy, a place where voting and putting the right people in office is important. I'll not disagree with you on that. But if you think that by fixing the problems in Washington we'll fix human hearts, you're wrong. Erwin Lutzer wrote a book called Don't Trust Politics to Do What Only the Cross Can. That's absolutely right. We need to be careful in our pursuit of wanting to change our world and not become like modern Zealots who think political solutions can do what only Jesus can do, which is to change human hearts.

Here's the great lesson here. I wonder if Simon lived long enough to experience this. There might be some zealots in this room who would say, "Wait a minute. Politics can change things. Great good can happen when the right people are in charge." And you're right. Absolutely it can. But here's the problem: it's usually short-lived.

In A.D. 69, the Zealots did what no other group ever did under the rule of the Roman Empire. They actually pushed Rome out of their world. For one year, the nation of Israel was no longer under the rule of Caesar in Rome. By political and military force, they pushed the Roman Empire out of Israel. For one year it was the "good ol' days." For one year, everything seemed to go great. I wonder if Simon the Zealot wondered, "Did I back the wrong horse? I followed Jesus Who said His Kingdom was not of this world."

Maybe this political thing had some life to it.” For one year, Israel was a sovereign nation. But then Rome said, “Okay, your fun and games are over.”

They assigned the Roman’s strongest general, Titus, to amass one of the largest armies known in human history to come to this little land of Israel. Jesus actually prophesied this would happen in His Olivet discourse in Matthew 24-25. “This generation will not pass away until it sees the destruction of Jerusalem.” He also said that one stone would not be left on top of another. Titus and his army came in and utterly decimated all of Jerusalem, hundreds of thousands of people were killed, then Rome took over again.

I think the lesson for us here is that political means can win for a season, but in the end, the only answer we have to change the world is Jesus. We don’t know what happened to Simon the Zealot. There are a whole bunch of conflicting reports in history of what happened to him that I won’t even go into.

Let’s walk through some takeaways this morning.

Notoriety doesn’t equate to intimacy.

By this I mean being well-known, being famous, does not equate to spiritual intimacy. These guys are completely obscure to us, yet here’s what we do know: They loved Jesus and Jesus loved them. They were used by Jesus. In fact, Mark 3 tells us they did some really significant things that just weren’t recorded. It’s a reminder, especially as we look around this room, that we can sometimes allow externals to impact our perception. Here are some externals I want us to be careful about and I want you to hear it from me.

There are several externals right now that are saying I’m the most important person in the room. What are they? It’s the lights, vocal amplification, a piece of furniture, you guys there and me here. These externals can communicate that I’m the most spiritual guy in the room. I want you to know right now that I’m not even close. I know so many of you who are far more faithful, who love the Lord more diligently, who serve the Lord more whole-heartedly than I do on my best days. By the grace of God, I’ve been given this opportunity and I pray I never sully this position. But I don’t ever want you to think that because anyone’s picture is on the website with a title by it, that they’re more spiritual than someone else. Listen, notoriety does not equate to spiritual intimacy.

This church has been built on the faithfulness and service of hundreds of individuals whose names will never make the paper. But I’ll tell you this: their names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. They are loved by God. And many are communing with our Savior. Their sandals are too worthy for me to even untie because they are truly the faithful ones.

So maybe this morning you’re sitting in obscurity and wondering, “When will my opportunity come? When does my name get put in the spotlight?” Your name may never be there. But know that your works are known by your God. He has a record of them and says, “Great is your reward in heaven.” I imagine that the rewards in heaven are better than standing on a stage. So stay faithful.

Diversity should not impact our unity.

This was true of Jesus’ disciples. They were all different; likewise we are all different. We need to be careful because “diversity” in our day can be a code for being the most important thing. It’s by far not the most important thing. There are diversities in race, ethnicity, gender, age, socio-economic status, preferences.

We see this most clearly with two disciples: Matthew the tax collector and Simon the Zealot. These two guys were more polar opposites. One worked for the Roman government; the other sought the destruction of the government. Have you ever wondered how dinnertime went. One man took taxes to make sure the government kept working; the other one sought to reduce the power of government by any means possible. Yet these guys who were so opposite were brought into unity under the banner of Jesus.

When we gather together as Christians, we gather under the same banner. We’re different. We have different preferences. We have different ideas of how things should be done. We have different approaches, different cultures, different traditions. But when we come to Jesus, we’re brought together. Never let our unity be dismantled by our diversity. As different as they were, these men found unity in Jesus Christ—we should do the same.

Availability is the greatest necessity.

The thing we learn from these three men, and really from all the disciples, is that availability is the greatest necessity. Jesus said to these men, "Follow Me." I don't know where they were before this. We don't know what they were doing or what their lives were like. We do know that James and John left their nets and their father's business to follow Jesus. But these were real men who had real lives that they left to follow Jesus.

Here's what Thaddaeus communicates to us in his question to Jesus. When Jesus explains who He will make Himself available to, who He will make Himself known to, it will be those who make themselves available to Him.

This morning, after a summer of learning about these disciples, maybe you're thinking, "I wish I had a relationship like they did with Jesus." Jesus says, "I will give you that kind of relationship if you will make yourself available to Me, if you'll keep My commands and welcome Me into your life."

Now once a month, we celebrate a time of communion together. I don't think there's any better way for us to celebrate communion than by examining our hearts and asking, "Like these followers of Jesus Christ, am I available to Jesus today? Is there anything I'm keeping from Him? Is there sin, a practice or a pursuit in which I say, 'Jesus, that's off limits to You. Don't go there; that's mine'?" Jesus says, "I want all of you because I want to commune with you. I want to make Myself known to you. I want you to know Me like you know nothing else in this world." It's here that the Spirit of almighty God fills us. It's here where He reveals the wonderful truths of being in communion with Him.

So would you just take a couple moments and ask the Lord, "Is there something in me that's not available to You?" If the Lord by His Spirit reveals something, would you confess that? Would you proclaim with the rest of the people here that it's only through the blood and body of Jesus Christ, the gift given on the cross of Calvary, that we have the ability to enter into a relationship with Jesus at all.

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All Scriptures quoted directly English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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