

Transcript

The Jesus Story - The Twelve Apostles

Over the years, if there is one thing that I have discovered it is the simple truth that the more I study the Life of Jesus, the more I realise just how little I know.

I have been a Christian for over sixty years. I have been preaching for over fifty years; beside my normal studying and daily readings, I have must have read the bible through, cover to cover, ten or twenty times.

Now, this is the wonder of the Word of God. There is still so much for me to find out, still so many of those WOW moments for me to enjoy when the Holy Spirit reveals something new from the bible.

John, in the last verse of his gospel tells us, (21:25):

25 And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

The Word of God is a well that we can drink from time and time and time again, in the sure knowledge that it is never going to run dry.

Up to now we have been following the “Life of Jesus” in Luke’s Gospel. Now we arrive at chapter 6:

1 Now it happened on the second Sabbath after the first that He went through the grain fields. And His disciples plucked the heads of grain and ate them, rubbing them in their hands.

2 And some of the Pharisees said to them, “Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?”

What they were trying to do is accuse them of breaking the Laws of the Sabbath. This was ridiculous because both Jesus and His disciples taught that the Sabbath Laws should be fully obeyed. Jesus only violated Jewish manmade traditions, not Divine law. This was the first of a whole series of conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees about the Sabbath.

A little further on in verse 6 we read:

6 Now it happened on another Sabbath, also, that He entered the synagogue and taught. And a man was there whose right hand was withered.

7 So the scribes and Pharisees watched Him closely, whether He would heal on the Sabbath, that they might find an accusation against Him.

8 But He knew their thoughts, and said to the man who had the withered hand, “Arise and stand here.” And he arose and stood.

9 Then Jesus said to them, “I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?”

This was yet another encounter between Jesus and the Pharisees about the Sabbath in the synagogue on that Sabbath. Jesus found a man with a withered right hand.

The scribes and Pharisees, who were increasingly turning against Him watched to see if He would heal on the Sabbath so that they could discredit Him.

Jesus confirmed that it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath. With this miracle, Jesus demonstrated that the Sabbath command was never intended to forbid acts of mercy and kindness to others.

In verse 10 we read:

10 And when He had looked around at them all, He said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” And he did so, and his hand was restored as whole as the other.

Jesus looked around at each one of them waiting for their answer but no-one spoke. So Jesus told the man to stand up and stretch out his hand. When he did, it was restored as whole as the other.

Now, verse 11 tells us:

11 But they were filled with rage, and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.

The question that Jesus put to the Pharisees: “Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy?” We can see very clearly here, just who is observing the Sabbath. Jesus heals a man with a withered hand, and all that the Pharisees want to do is to destroy Jesus.

This action was a wonderful test. Will God allow the healing to take place? Will He vindicate Jesus and reveal the answer to Jesus’ question?

Jesus looks at everyone and then acts. He asks the man to stretch out his hand and the man is able to do this, demonstrating that healing has taken place. But rather than rejoicing at his restoration, the Pharisees become angry at Jesus’ success.

This is something that we really need to understand. Anyone’s observance of the Sabbath day has no value if we are not living out our Christian Witness every day. We sang a chorus in Sunday School years ago and the first line had a good message:

I want to be more than a Sunday go to meeting Christian, I want a religion that thrills me every day.

In Psalm 118:24, David tells us very clearly just what the Lord’s day really is. This is what we read:

24 This is the day the LORD has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.

Not yesterday or tomorrow; this is the day. This miracle demonstrates the priority that God shows. He is compassionate and wants us to help others whenever possible. Even a day of rest, like the Sabbath is no reason to opt out of doing good.

Now, in verse twelve, Jesus goes from sorting out the opposition to the selection of the team that he wanted to work with him. Now, the first thing that we need to see is just how Jesus approached this situation? This was going to be one of the most important decisions that Jesus would have to make in all his ministry.

12 Now it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

Now here is a good question: “Why did Jesus pray?” This is sometimes puzzling for Christians. After all, if Jesus is God, why did Jesus need to pray? Well, there are at least three good reasons that Jesus prayed.

First, Jesus prayed to set an example to his followers; this is an example we should continue to learn from.

Second, the Incarnation consists of both divine and human natures; from His human nature, it was perfectly natural for a Jewish believer such as Jesus to pray.

Third, the nature of the Trinity allows for communication between its members; we find this at creation Gen1:26 when God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness;

The members of the God head do talk to each other As God the Son, Jesus could pray to God the Father. When Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, He gave us an insight to the right way to approach God. Remember these were the words that Jesus used: “Yet not as I will, but as You will,”

Jesus offered a tremendous but seemingly simple procedure when we make our requests known to God. We need to remember that God is in charge. As we learn from the prayer life of Jesus, and there is so much to learn, we need to keep this basic principle in mind. If we want answers to our prayers we need to pray according to the will of God.

The Bible is full of encouragement to the believer, that God will guide those who ask Him. This is how Paul encouraged the believers in the Church in Philippi, he told them 4:6:

6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;

Christians can seek guidance about anything. If Jesus found it necessary to pray, then we really need to understand just how important it is for us to pray before we make decisions

As humans we live in time, we are unable to change the past or see the future when we are making certain decisions, and there are times when feel that everything depends on making the right one.

With all those big life changing decisions going to the Lord should be the first place that we go to for any sort of guidance. When we do this we find that the answer to our prayers will usually come from reading the word of God and sometimes it comes from advice of godly Christian brothers and sisters. The Bible is full of encouragement to the believer that God will guide those who ask Him.

After spending a whole night in prayer to His Father this is what we read:

13 And when it was day, He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose twelve whom He also named apostles:

14 Simon, whom He also named Peter, and Andrew his brother; James and

John; Philip and Bartholomew;

15 Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot;

16 Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.

I don't think that we really appreciate the importance of the decision that Jesus was making here. We need first of all to see the conditions that surrounded that decision. We need to see the people who were there at that time and then take a look at the men that he chose.

Verse 17 Tells us:

17 And He came down with them and stood on a level place...

Now just listen to this.

...with a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon,

When most people talk about Jesus and His disciples they have a picture in their minds of Jesus and twelve men walking from village to village preaching. Nothing could be further from the truth. This is what we read in verse seventeen: 'With a crowd of His disciples and a great multitude of people.' 'During the year of His popularity Jesus was never free from the crowds and the number of disciples that followed Him were many. Luke 10 tells us that on one occasion:

1 After these things the Lord appointed seventy others also, and sent them two by two before His face into every city and place where He Himself was about to go.

Jesus chose very ordinary men. The qualifications that Jesus was looking for were simply men who were willing to leave all and follow Him. In the ones that he chose Jesus could see honest believing men who possessed sacrificial hearts.

They were all different in their temperaments and attitudes, they all had their share of strengths and weaknesses. Jesus knew them well he had walked with them they had prayed together, they had ministered together, they were chosen because they were the best that could be had.

Interestingly, not one of the chosen twelve disciples was a scholar or rabbi. They had no extraordinary skills, they were ordinary people, just like you and me. God selected and used each of these ordinary men to carry out his exceptional plan.

We don't know just how many were in this crowd of disciples, but we know that out of this crowd of disciples, He chose twelve whom He also named apostles.

Why is it important for us to know who these men were? Because we owe them a debt. We owe them a debt for taking the Gospel to the world. They did not fear for their lives, but they persevered on and gave their all to take the Gospel to the whole world.

Church history tells us that every one of them was martyred except for John. He was sent into exile on the Island of Patmos where the Emperor hoped to silence his

testimony. But that did not work; that is where John wrote the book of Revelation.

Jesus called them Apostles and each and every one of them, except for the traitor Judas, would return this call with years of faithful service. But there is something else that we need to take particular notice of, and that is how some of the disciples developed a closer relationship with Jesus than the others.

Out of the many disciples that Jesus had he chose twelve to be with Him and as we read about these in the gospels we find that out of those twelve, on three separate occasions Jesus chose Peter, James and John to be with Him. These three were closer to Jesus than the twelve.

When Jesus raised the Daughter of Jairus from the dead, in Mark 5v37 we read:

37 He did not let anyone follow him except Peter, James and John.

Describing the Transfiguration of Jesus, Mark tells us in 9v2:

2 After six days Jesus took Peter, James and John with him and led them up a high mountain, where they were all alone. There he was transfigured before them.

Towards the end of the Lord's earthly ministry, Mark describes the scene at Gethsemane, 14v32-33:

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, And Jesus said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray."

33 He took Peter, James and John along with him.

Of the three that were so close to Jesus, it seems as if John was even closer than the other two. We see this when we read the account of the crucifixion when we see those around the cross. Jesus is concerned about His mother's welfare, this is what we read in John's gospel, 19v26-27:

26 When Jesus saw His mother there, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, "Dear Woman here is your son".

27 And to the disciple, "here is your mother." From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.

It's not surprising that John was described as: "The disciple who Jesus loved." We can read all the accounts in the gospels of the crucifixion, and the only one of the twelve recorded to have been there was John.

When we look at the disciples that Jesus had and we see their different relationships with the Lord: the many; the seventy two; the twelve; the three; and down to the disciple who Jesus loved, John, we can understand why Jesus spent a whole night in prayer when He chose the twelve that He would call Apostles.

The twelve that Jesus chose were to become extraordinary people, they gave up everything to follow Jesus and continued following Him, doing His work long after He ascended into heaven.

These men experienced a radical change of heart and mind when Jesus called them. They were willing to let Jesus be the master of their lives. They listened intently and

always spoke with Him.

You can learn a lot from these men. These were some of the greatest Christians on earth and their main goal was simply to be like Jesus. These men became the pioneering leaders of the New Testament church. From scripture, we can see that Jesus had many disciples, but only twelve of them were chosen and called apostles (Luke 6:13).

And what is interesting is that part of their reward was their names being on the foundation walls in heaven. This is what we read in Revelation 21:14:

14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Each apostle had a different role; some were well known, while others were unknown. All that was expected of them, was for them to fulfil the tasks they were given to do. We are not to compare ourselves with others; we must stay on track and do what the Lord has called each one of us to do.

The twelve apostles of the Lord were human beings, like you and me. They had their flaws but this did not stop them from doing a great work for the Lord.

The setting of Jesus' selection is no accident. Jesus spends the entire previous night in prayer. So his selection is set in a context of communion with God. What bound these Apostles together, was their relationship to Jesus. The twelve Apostles of Jesus were the foundation stones of His church.

When we are told that the twelve foundations of the wall of the New Jerusalem will have in them the names of the twelve apostles then we can see that God attaches great importance to these twelve men.

To finish with I would just like to compare the lives of two of those that Jesus chose to be apostles just to see what lessons we can learn from them. The natural selection would be as they are listed in the gospels.

The first in all the listings of the disciples was Peter, and the last in all those listings was Judas. Both of them had their share of failures. There was a great difference between Peter and Judas.

Both had the same opportunities; both walked with Jesus; both witnessed the same miracles, heard the same teaching; both had observed the compassion and the care that Jesus showed to everyone; both were loved with exactly the same unconditional love; both of them had their share of failures; both failed the Lord big time.

The big difference was when they realised that they had failed, how they reacted.

First Peter: without question, Peter was the one that most of us can identify with. One minute he was walking on water by faith, and the next he was sinking in doubt. Most of us will remember Peter because he was the disciple that denied the Lord three times.

When we read what the bible has to say about Peter we find that he was quite outspoken. He seems to be the disciple that asked most of the questions. Peter was the only disciple that asked if he could walk on water (Matthew 14:28).

When Jesus asked His disciples about His real identity and what men say about Him, It was Peter that answered: “You are the Christ; the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15-16).

So, what can we learn from the life of Peter? Peter was used mightily of the Lord; Peter had a great destiny in the Lord, and thank God that he fulfilled it. The Lord knew Peter’s heart and though he denied Jesus three times, the Lord knew just what was in his heart.

There is a wonderful message the angel at the empty tomb brought. Peter after his denial of Jesus would be feeling really down, but just look at the angels message:

7 “But go, tell His disciples — and Peter that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.”

After Peter failed the Lord we read that (Lu 22:62):

62 So Peter went out and wept bitterly.

Peter repented and was restored.

Judas Iscariot, who also became a traitor. When we read through the gospels we find that the gospel writers did not pull any punches when describing Judas.

There was the time in the house at Bethany where they had prepared a special supper for Jesus, this was a wonderful occasion. We can read of this in John chapter twelve. Here we have a very clear picture of just what motivated Judas.

Mary took a jar of very expensive anointing oil and anointed the feet of Jesus. Then we read that Judas said, why didn’t we sell this oil and give the money to the poor. Not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief and had the money box; he used to take what was put in it.

In John chapter 13, we find that Jesus had the measure of Judas when talking to His disciples, Jesus makes this statement:

21 I say to you, one of you will betray Me.

Then in verse 26, Jesus tells them which one it will be.

26 Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I shall give a piece of bread when I have dipped it.” And having dipped the bread, He gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon.

Between verses 26 and 27, there comes a turning point. Up until now Jesus was giving Judas the opportunity to repent. Everything offered to the chosen apostles, was offered to Judas, even, being named as an apostle.

27 Now after the piece of bread, Satan entered him. Then Jesus said to him, “What you do, do quickly.”

I wonder just what Jesus was feeling emotionally when He said: “What you do, do quickly.” Jesus had given Judas every opportunity to repent, right up to the very end, even as far as choosing him to be an apostle.

We just could not imagine what Jesus must have felt when they came to arrest Him,

after all that Jesus had done for him. The way that Judas chose to betray Jesus was awful, from Luke 22:47:

47 And while He was still speaking, behold, a multitude; and he who was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them and drew near to Jesus to kiss Him.

48 But Jesus said to him, “Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?”

When we read the prayer of Jesus in John chapter seventeen, Jesus has come to the end of His ministry on earth and this sounds just like a progress report on all that He had done, but the verse that I would like us to focus on is verse twelve (John 17:12):

12 “While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

Jesus never makes mistakes: “Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost.”

Jesus never makes mistakes: Peter was given the opportunity to repent, and he did. Judas was given the same opportunity to repent, but he didn't.

There is a scale between Peter and Judas. Peter always mentioned first in the list of the disciples. One of the three chosen by Jesus on special occasions. The leader in the early church.

We then have Judas: he was a thief and had the money box, and he used to take what was put in it. He was the one who betrayed Jesus for money. Somewhere between those two extremes of disciples is where we all stand.

Today, Jesus is still looking for disciples. There is still a work that He wants doing. There is a couple of verses in Ephesians chapter two that we often quote and apply to ourselves, verses eight and nine:

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God,

9 not of works, lest anyone should boast.

We can all say amen to that. But the next verse, verse ten, applies to us as well, it tells us:

10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

When you break this verse down it becomes more amazing. “For we are His workmanship”, what a back stamp that is; “Made by God”.

“Created in Christ Jesus for good works”, this gets even better, born again, we are a new creation.

“Which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”, and the reason for all this, God has planned a work for you to do. He has prepared a work for each one of us, personally tailored, to use whatever talents he has bestowed on us.

This is the first verse of a hymn we sang years ago, but this verse is just as relevant today as it ever was:

There's a work for Jesus, ready at your hand,

'Tis a task the Master just for you has planned.

Haste to do His bidding, yield Him service true;

There's a work for Jesus none but you can do.

I want to leave you with some very good news today. We are all still a work in progress and the Lord can still use us with all our issues. It all depends on our availability. Are we available to the Lord?