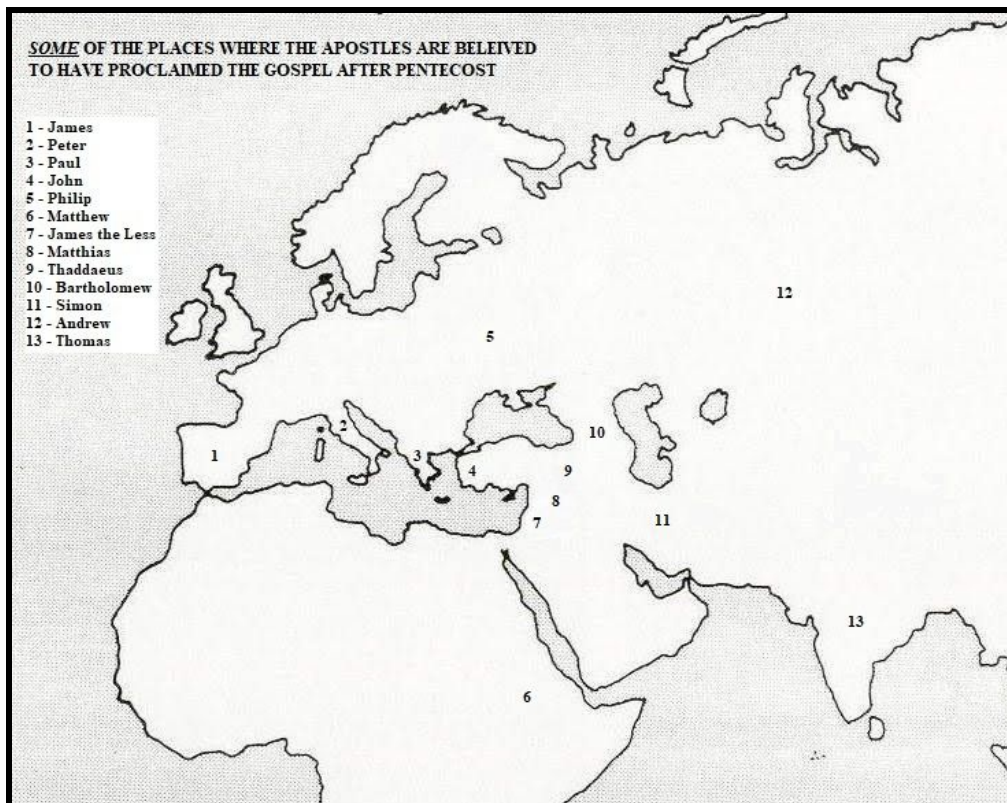


The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ

This 11-part series of messages was written and preached by Pastor Russell Roberts at Calvary Baptist Church in Seymour, Texas from January through March of 2019. It provides a brief biographical description of each of the apostles as recorded in the Bible, while citing other sources and traditions on occasion.

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The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ - Peter

Originally Preached on 1/13/2019

After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you. - 1 Peter 5:10

Good morning. I am excited to begin 2019 with a brand new sermon series called "The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ". Over the course of the next few months we will carefully examine each of these men to learn more about their lives and ministries. At the conclusion of each message, we will consider how their experiences apply to us and what lessons we can learn as a result. This promises to be an informative and transformational series!

Let's begin by distinguishing between a disciple and an apostle. A disciple is someone who has placed their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Jesus is calling everyone everywhere to become a disciple, and He teaches us what is necessary to be a true disciple. The word disciple can be thought of synonymously with the name Christian. All Christians are disciples because they have believed in Jesus, and thus are commissioned to go and make other disciples by sharing the gospel message. There are thousands of disciples and the number continues to grow.

The word apostle has a somewhat different definition. It literally means, "One who is sent." The emphasis is here is on the sender. In other words, apostles were those who Jesus specifically chose and then sent out to establish the church. They did not approach Jesus first, but rather He came to and selected them as His own. Some interpret this concept in a broader spiritual sense and continue to apply the title of apostle to certain people who are sent today, such as missionaries. Generally speaking however, Baptists have a more restrictive understanding of apostleship that is limited to only those men that Jesus personally chose during His earthly ministry. Most Baptists do not use the title apostle to describe people today. We believe that there were only a small number of apostles and none have been added since the days of the New Testament.

All apostles were disciples, but not all disciples were apostles. The apostles were a small subset, or select group, of disciples. The apostles were prominent leaders among the disciples and served alongside them in carrying the gospel throughout the known world. The apostles were highly regarded and revered because they personally knew

and served with Jesus. The apostles were chosen to follow while the disciples chose to follow, yet both groups were equally the redeemed children of God. In the same way, all real Christians have been both chosen by God (His will) and choose to follow Him (their will). This is the nature of any healthy relationship.

In this series we will learn about the 12 men who Jesus chose to be His apostles, the man who served as a replacement for a deceased apostle, and an apostle who was born “at the wrong time”. There are a few other people who were called apostles in the New Testament, but we will limit our discussion to just these. These men include: Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the Less, Simon the Zealot, Thaddeus, Judas Iscariot, Matthias, and Paul. We will begin our series this morning with Peter.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Peter is called by a few different names in the Bible. Among them are Simon Barjona (Simon son of Jona), Cephas (little rock or stone), Simon Peter, and mostly commonly just Peter. Peter was the son of Jona and was born in Bethsaida of Galilee. As an adult he lived in Capernaum where he worked as a fisherman. Peter was the brother of Andrew, and was a business partner with James and John. Peter was married, as evidenced by the fact that he had a mother-in-law. Peter was one of the leading apostles, and a member of the inner circle (those who were closest to Jesus).

The Bible describes Peter as impulsive, often speaking or acting before thinking things through. On occasion he acted quite cowardly and was afraid to stand firm. Peter had a hot temper, but could also be very tenderhearted. Sometimes he showed incredible insight, and other times seemed rather dense. Most of us can identify with Peter and the struggles he faced. But for all of his imperfections, after Jesus’s resurrection Peter became a bold and courageous leader in the early church.

Peter was one of the few apostles who penned writings that were included as books of the Bible. He wrote 1st and 2nd Peter, both of which are letters that were addressed to Christians in the early church. Although he didn’t write it himself, the gospel of Mark is believed to be based primarily upon the spoken testimony of Peter.

II. HIS MINISTRY WITH JESUS

Peter was one of the four fishermen that Jesus called while walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee. They had been out fishing all night and had caught nothing, but

when they encountered Jesus on the beach that morning He told them to cast their nets out into the deep water. When they did, the nets were filled with fish and the men were amazed. Then Jesus asked them to leave everything behind, to follow Him, and He promised to make them “fishers of men”. Peter, as well as the others, answered the call and became apostles (Matthew 4:18-22).

Peter was one of three apostles who had a particularly close relationship with Jesus. Unlike most of the others, Peter was allowed to accompany Jesus into the room when Jairus’ daughter was healed (Mark 5:37), was permitted to join Jesus atop the Mountain of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2), was invited to meet privately with Jesus on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3), and was brought deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of Jesus’ arrest (Mark 14:33).

During a raging storm at sea, Peter climbed out of the boat and briefly walked on water toward Jesus (Matthew 14:28-29). Later on, perhaps speaking on behalf of all the apostles, Peter recognized and verbally confessed Jesus as the Christ (Matthew 16:16-19). He was harshly reprimanded for refusing to accept that Jesus would be crucified (Matthew 16:23). He also cut off a man’s ear during Jesus’s arrest (John 18:10). Peter denied knowing Jesus 3 times, but was later forgiven and restored (Luke 22:54-62; John 21:15-17). Peter raced to see the empty tomb on the morning that Jesus arose (John 20:3), and was the only apostle that Jesus appeared to individually after His resurrection (Luke 24:34).

III. HIS MINISTRY AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

After the ascension of Jesus into Heaven, Peter became the de facto leader of the apostles. He encouraged them to name a new apostle to replace Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:16-26). When the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles on the day of Pentecost, Peter delivered a stirring message that led to the conversion of 3,000 people (Acts 2). Empowered by the Lord, Peter healed a lame man who was lying near the temple gate (Acts 3:1-10). Peter was arrested for preaching the gospel and imprisoned on multiple occasions, but always managed to be either released or miraculously freed (Acts 4:1-22; 5:17-42; 12:1-17). He confronted Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-16), taught in Samaria and many other places, performed several miracles including raising a dead woman back to life (Acts 9:36-43), and was the first to present the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Later on Peter was present and spoke at the Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15).

Peter was a pillar of the early Christian church in Jerusalem. At some point, he traveled to Rome and may have been instrumental in establishing the church there as well. Peter wrote letters to encourage and correspond with the persecuted churches. Eventually Peter was arrested and imprisoned in Rome, likely by the crazed Emperor Nero. Tradition states that Peter requested to be crucified upside down because he didn't feel worthy to be executed in the same manner as Jesus. He was martyred sometime around 67-68 AD.

CONCLUSION

There is much more we could say about the Apostle Peter. In fact, we could probably do an entire series on just him. The details we've mentioned this morning are only some of the many found in Scripture. Though not exhaustive, we have covered several of the most notable events that took place in Peter's life and have presented a fairly thorough overview of this apostle.

Peter made many mistakes, and often stuck his foot in his mouth. He tended to leap before he looked, which regularly got him into trouble. He sometimes said things that he later wished he could take back. I can relate to that. But despite his numerous missteps, Jesus repeatedly forgave and restored Peter. Jesus loved Peter beyond his faults, just as he does to all believers.

The lesson today is this - Jesus will forgive the shortcomings and strengthen the faith of those who truly love Him. He doesn't expect us to be perfect, but rather to be faithful and obedient. May we all, like Peter before us, have the courageous faith necessary to step out of our boats and to walk on the waters of this life in the mighty name of Jesus' Christ!

The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ - Andrew

Originally Preached on 1/20/2019

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. - Romans 1:16

Last Sunday we began a new series called “The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ”. The stated purpose of this study is to learn some basic information about each of the apostles and to allow their experiences to strengthen our personal relationships with Jesus. Personally, I think that all Christians should be able to name the 12 apostles from memory, and I hope that by the end of this series all of us can. Consider that to be a challenge from the pastor....

Before we get started, let’s take a moment to compare the 12 apostles of Jesus with the 12 tribes of Israel. In the Old Testament, the 12 tribes of Israel were the descendants of the 12 sons of Jacob. They represented the people of God during the Old Testament, during the time of the old covenant. The 12 apostles were the first people to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and therefore were the founders of the Christian church. They represent the people of God during the New Testament who live under the new covenant. Therefore, when coupled together, the apostles and the tribes collectively represent the people of God for all time.

We began this collection of messages last week with an overview of Peter, perhaps the most well-known of the apostles. While there is an abundance of information written in the Bible about him, there is much less about his brother Andrew. That said, there is still a lot we can learn about the apostle Andrew. He will be our focus today.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Andrew is the only name by which this apostle is called in the Bible. The name Andrew derives from the Greek and means “manly”. Andrew is sometimes referred to in other sources as the protokletos, or the “first called”. As stated earlier, Andrew and Peter were brothers, the sons of Jona. They were both born in Bethsaida of Galilee, but lived in Capernaum as adults. Andrew worked with his brother Peter as a commercial fisherman, along with their business partners James and John. Andrew was originally a disciple of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. It was the teaching of John the Baptist that initially led Andrew to follow Jesus.

God's Word reveals that Andrew was quite enthusiastic about Christ. He excitedly wanted to tell others, especially those closest to him, about Jesus. Andrew was also inquisitive, wanting to learn and know more about those things which confounded him. He was quite resourceful and showed the ability to find quick and clever ways to solve problems. Andrew, like the other apostles, showed tremendous faith by leaving their former lives behind to follow Jesus and courageous resolve to preach the gospel after He'd gone.

Andrew did not write any books of the Bible, though he is specifically mentioned in the gospels and in Acts. There are a few early church writings that bear his name, such as the Acts of Andrew, but they were not and are not considered to be inspired works. As such, they cannot be fully trusted as credible or accurate. The only source of absolute truth is the Bible itself.

II. HIS MINISTRY WITH JESUS

Andrew was one of 4 fisherman who Jesus called to follow Him and become "fishers of men". He officially became an apostle on the the same day as Peter, James, and John (Mark 1:16-20). However, prior to this Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist. When Jesus first came onto the scene, John the Baptist recognized and proclaimed Him to be the Lamb of God. Andrew was intrigued and curious, so he (along with another one of John the Baptist's disciples) followed Jesus for a day or so and even went to where the Lord was staying. During this time Andrew became thoroughly convinced that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. Overjoyed, Andrew hurriedly went and found his brother Peter, then brought him to meet Jesus (John 1:35-42). Therefore, both Peter and Andrew were somewhat acquainted with Jesus before they were later chosen to be His apostles.

Following His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, there were some Greeks in the city who had come for the Passover feast and wanted to met Jesus. They are generally believed to have been Gentiles, not converts to the Jewish faith (proselytes). These men first approached Philip, who in turn told Andrew. Then both Andrew and Philip carried their request for a meeting to Jesus. The Bible doesn't ever explicitly say whether or not Jesus personally met with them, but His response to Andrew and Philip indicated that anyone - either Jew or Gentile - could serve and/or follow Him (John 12:20-26).

One day while Jesus was teaching a large crowd of 5,000 people, He noticed that they were hungry and decided to feed them all. The apostles didn't have enough money to buy food for everyone, and were at a loss for what to do. Andrew found a young boy

among the crowd who had 5 small loaves of bread and 2 little fish. Andrew doubted that such a tiny amount of food would be sufficient, but Jesus took the boy's lunch and blessed it. Then He began to distribute it, and the bread and fish miraculously multiplied so that everyone had plenty and there were even 12 baskets of leftovers (6:1-13).

Although Andrew was not part of Jesus' "inner circle" of apostles, he did get to join them for a private meeting on the Mount of Olives (Mark 13:3). Andrew was also present with the apostles during the Last Supper, at Jesus' arrest, and for several of the post-resurrection appearances of Christ including the Great Commission. There are only a few times in the Bible when Andrew is mentioned specifically; nevertheless he was certainly with the Lord frequently during Jesus' earthly ministry.

III. HIS MINISTRY AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

Scripture does not say much about Andrew after the Lord's ascension into heaven. He was present in the upper room with the apostles and other disciples when they chose Matthias to replace Judas (Acts 1:13), but this is the only direct Biblical reference to him outside of the gospels. It is safe to assume he was present on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles. But after that, the details of his life are speculative and uncertain.

Tradition states that Andrew left Jerusalem and preached the gospel in Greece, Asia Minor, and Russia. It is widely believed that Andrew was crucified by the Romans on an X-shaped cross. Similar to his brother Peter, who requested to be crucified upside down, so also Andrew purportedly asked to be slain on an X-shaped cross because he felt unworthy to be martyred in the same way as Jesus.

CONCLUSION

It is interesting to think that Andrew was a disciple of John the Baptist prior to becoming an apostle of Jesus. He must have been very familiar with John the Baptist's message of repentance which called the Jews to make way for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. His relationship with John the Baptist indicates that he was a religious man, even before meeting Jesus. This stands in stark contrast with some of the other apostles.

One of Andrew's greatest attributes was his eagerness to make Jesus known. When Andrew realized who Jesus was, he raced to tell his brother. Andrew did not miss the opportunity to introduce his loved ones to Jesus. We would do well to follow his

example. I wonder how many of us, myself included, have lost family members that we've never spoken to about the Lord. Perhaps some of us need to tell our relatives about the Savior we've met.

Whatsmore, Andrew appealed to Jesus on behalf of the Gentiles long before either Peter or Paul began preaching to them. In other words, Andrew was one of the very first who wanted the message of Christ to be shared with everyone - not just the Jews. He had no problem with introducing a bunch of Greeks to the Lord. Andrew realized that salvation isn't reserved to an elite group of people, but rather is available to all. The church should be an open group, that welcomes anyone and everyone who comes seeking Jesus.

In our next message, we will discuss the first of another pair of brothers who were included among the apostles. Some of you might want to venture a guess, but I am going to make you wait to find out. It will be a surprise! Until then, may we all exhibit the enthusiasm of Andrew in our daily walks with Jesus.

The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ - James

Originally Preached on 1/27/2019

Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. - Matthew 10:28

Good morning. Today's message is the 3rd installment of our new sermon series on the 12 apostles. By the time it's over, we will actually have discussed 14 men who served in this special role. While the New Testament grants the title of apostle to a few others in addition to these, this particular study will include only those who were Jesus' apostles in the strictest sense of the word.

It is worth noting that Jesus limited the number of apostles to 12. He could have selected many more had He wanted to, but He didn't. Jesus purposely chose enough apostles to form a nice-sized group with varied personalities and opinions, but not so many that they couldn't all develop close relationships. Everyone knew each other, and were therefore accountable to one another. No one could hide or remain anonymous. Everyone had responsibilities and expectations. They enjoyed the sweet fellowship and brotherly affection that is sometimes lost in a large group. In addition, it was easier for Jesus to manage a small group and invest Himself personally into each of their lives. While Jesus always had a large following, He purposely kept those nearest to Him few in number. Following this example, it seems wise for churches to utilize a small group strategy in order to maximize their efforts as it pertains to discipleship and fellowship.

For the past 2 weeks we've talked about the brothers Peter and Andrew. Today and next Sunday we will deal with another pair of brothers who were also apostles - James and John. We will begin with the apostle James, who was likely the older of the two. Before we get started, please be aware that there was another lesser-known apostle also named James who we will cover later on in this series. We will do our best to keep them straight...

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

James is referred to by several other names including "the son of Zebedee", "Boanerges" (Son of Thunder), "James the Elder", and "James the Great". Because it was so common, these descriptors were sometimes used to distinguish him from other Biblical characters also named James. He and his brother John were the sons of Zebedee and Salome (a female follower of Jesus). He was a fisherman, along with his

father and brother, and a business partner with Peter and Andrew. These men worked on the sea of Galilee and lived in or near Capernaum.

Prior to the crucifixion Scripture portrays James as a fiery and vengeful man. Jesus nicknamed him and his brother John the “sons of thunder” because of their loud and sometimes foreboding behavior. James could be selfish and conceited, desiring special privileges and/or accolades for himself. Despite these imperfections, he was a member of the “inner circle” of apostles (Peter, James, and John) who were particularly close to Jesus. After the resurrection and ascension James was able to redirect his zeal and ambition to become a courageous leader in the early New Testament church.

The apostle James did not write any portion of the Bible, including the book of James. On the contrary, it was authored by Jesus’ brother James. Because they share the same name, these 2 men are often mistaken for one another. This confusion is compounded because James, the brother of Jesus, also became a prominent leader in the early church and is believed by many to have been the pastor of the first Christian congregation in Jerusalem.

II. HIS MINISTRY WITH JESUS

One day Jesus was teaching a large crowd by the shores of Lake Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee). He saw 2 boats and some fishermen who had come ashore and were cleaning their empty nets. Jesus climbed into one of the boats and was pushed out a little bit into the shallow water. From the floating stage, Jesus continued teaching His audience who listened intently from the beach. When He finished, Jesus told the weary fishermen to go back out and cast their nets again. Having just overheard Jesus’ preaching, they reluctantly agreed. The nets were immediately filled with fish, so much so that the boats themselves began to sink. Jesus then called these men to follow Him. James, along with the others, left everything behind and went with Jesus (Luke 5:1-11).

As a member of Jesus’ “inner circle”, James was allowed to see a few things up close and personal whereas the majority of Jesus’ apostles and other followers were not. James was privileged to witness the healing of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:37) and the Transfiguration of Christ (Mark 9:2). He also was invited to go deeper into the Garden of Gethsemane than most of the others on the night of Jesus’ arrest (Mark 14:33). These occurrences were special because they were unique to James, John, and Peter.

James was present with the apostles during the numerous scenes recorded in the gospels, but is only mentioned specifically on a few occasions. Near the end of His life, as Jesus was traveling to Jerusalem for the last time, He sent messengers ahead into a Samaritan village to make arrangements. When these messengers returned they informed Jesus to go around because the citizens did not wish to receive Him there. James and his brother John became furious and asked the Lord to reign down fire from heaven upon the village. Jesus reminded them that He'd come to save lives - not destroy them (Luke 9:51-56).

During this same journey to Jerusalem, James and John approached Jesus with a question. Apparently their mother Salome was involved in this incident as well (Matthew 20:20). They asked to be seated on the Lord's right and left in heaven. Jesus seemed shocked by their presumptuous request, and forewarned them of the harsh persecution they'd soon face. He denied their petition by explaining that such esteemed placement was not His to give. When the other 10 apostles learned of James' and John's brazen request, they became very upset. Jesus used the opportunity to teach them that those who desire to be great must become servants to everyone (Mark 10:35-45).

Following Jesus' resurrection, James saw Jesus several times. He was with the others for both of Jesus' appearances in the upper room, with the 7 apostles who ate breakfast with Jesus by the sea, on the mountain in Galilee where Jesus gave the Great Commission, and at the Mount of Olives when Jesus ascended into heaven. That said, the apostle James is not the person who Jesus appeared to privately (1 Corinthians 15:7); this encounter was between the risen Lord and His brother James.

III. HIS MINISTRY AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

After Jesus departed into heaven, James remained with the other apostles in Jerusalem and helped select Matthias (Acts 1:13). He was there at Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit fell upon the apostles and they began speaking in tongues. Tradition states that James was sent to Spain where he proclaimed the gospel for a few years before returning to Jerusalem.

James is believed to be the first of the apostles to be arrested and executed. King Herod Agrippa sought to satisfy the Jews by putting an end to the growing Christian movement. He had James put to death by the sword, presumably beheaded, sometime around 44 AD. James' martyrdom is the only one of the apostles' deaths actually recorded in the Bible (Acts 12:2). All references to James in the New Testament after this point refer to Jesus' brother.

CONCLUSION

Historical records indicate and it is generally accepted among scholars that all of the apostles, except for one, died as martyrs for their faith. That said, only James' death is specifically mentioned in the Bible. Therefore, we can be absolutely certain that James was killed due to his bold and unrelenting commitment to Christ. This begs the question... would we be willing to lay down our lives for the sake of the gospel? I don't mean figuratively - I mean literally.

Jesus speaks of a coming day when Christians will be slaughtered by the thousands for their faith. In truth, this has already been happening since the time of the New Testament in many places around the world. Christianity is illegal and believers are being heavily persecuted in several Islamic, Communist, and other nations. It is estimated that there are currently 215 million persecuted Christians world-wide, and these numbers continue to increase. One reputable religious organization has determined that over 70 million Christians have been martyred since Jesus walked the earth. We need to pray earnestly for the persecuted church.

James was among the first Christians to die for their faith, but he certainly wasn't the last. If and when this level of persecution comes to America - and it will sooner or later - will we have the courage to stand for Jesus and lay down our lives if necessary? Sometimes I wonder...

The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ - John

Originally Preached on 2/3/2019

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." - John 13:34-35

I truly hope you are enjoying our new sermon series on "The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ". More than that, I hope you are learning and applying the truths we're discussing to your life. The apostles were ordinary men, each with various strengths and weaknesses. Like us, they were flawed and sinful. Yet Jesus personally chose them and developed them into mature, strong, and uncompromising believers. He can do the same thing with us...

Today's message focuses on the life and ministry of John. He and Peter are perhaps the most commonly recognized of the apostles. John was also a prolific writer whose inspired works have been preserved in the Bible and read by millions of people. Under the unction of the Holy Spirit, John penned the most famous verse of Scripture - John 3:16.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The apostle John is sometimes called "the son of Zebedee", "Boanerges" (Son of Thunder), "The Beloved Disciple" (or "The Disciple that Jesus Loved"), "The Evangelist", and/or "The Revealer". John was the brother of James, the son of Zebedee and Salome. Some scholars identify Salome as Mary's sister, which would thereby make John (and James for that matter) cousins of Jesus. John was a professional fisherman who worked with his father and brother, along with his partners Peter and Andrew. It is important to distinguish the apostle John from John the Baptist, and also from the New Testament missionary John Mark.

Like his brother James, John did not always have the most thoughtful or virtuous attitude and the pair shared the dubious nickname "The Sons of Thunder" (Mark 3:17). He desired vengeance upon those who refused Jesus passage through their village (Luke 9:51-55). John tried to hinder someone who was casting out demons in Jesus' name but wasn't following Him (Mark 9:38-41). He selfishly asked for special recognition when seeking to sit at Jesus' side in glory (Matthew 20:20-23). It is widely believed that John was the youngest of the apostles, possibly just a teenager, and many of his

statements prior to the Lord's resurrection certainly revealed a lack of maturity. But as he aged, John's behavior radically changed and he became an important figure in the early church.

The apostle John wrote 5 books of the Bible - the gospel of John, the 3 epistles titled 1st, 2nd, and 3rd John, and the apocalyptic vision called Revelation. All of these were written later in John's life, likely 30-50 years after the crucifixion of Christ. The gospel of John is uniquely different than the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and is considered by many Christians to be their favorite book of the Bible.

II. HIS MINISTRY WITH JESUS

Many Bible experts suspect that John (the apostle) was in fact the unnamed disciple of John the Baptist who was mentioned in John 1:35-42. If so, both he and Andrew would have met and become somewhat acquainted with Jesus prior to their famous encounter on the shore of Lake Gennesaret. Perhaps they had told Jesus where they worked, so later He went to that specific area of the beach looking for them. Whether intentional or incidental, when Jesus arrived He called 4 fishermen to leave their boats and nets behind to follow Him. John was one of these men, along with James, Peter, and Andrew (Mark 1:16-20).

In his gospel, John referred to himself anonymously as "the disciple whom Jesus loved". He obviously had a close personal relationship with the Lord. He was a member of the "inner circle" of apostles that were privileged to experience the Transfiguration, the healing of Jairus' daughter, and a few other special events that have been mentioned previously in this series. John seemed to follow his brother James' lead, or perhaps it was the other way around, as they often approached and conversed with Jesus together.

John really begins to stand out among the apostles at the very end of Jesus' earthly ministry. The Lord asked him (and Peter) to prepare the upper room for the Last Supper (Luke 22:8). John wrote extensively about the events that happened at the dinner that night. John is the only gospel writer to record that Jesus washed the apostles' feet. This act of humility had a profound and lasting effect on John. He reclined right next to Jesus during the Last Supper, even leaning upon Him at times (John 13).

When Jesus was arrested and taken to the high priest, John was permitted to go inside the court and was even able to convince them to let Peter in the gate (John 18:15-16). Later John was standing with Jesus' mother and a few other women at the foot of the

cross during the crucifixion. He may have been the only apostle present at Calvary to actually witness the death of Jesus. It was on this occasion that the Lord asked John to take care of His aging mother Mary (John 19:25b-27). The fact that Jesus asked John to undertake such an important responsibility is very telling.

On the morning of Jesus' resurrection, John and Peter ran to and even entered the empty tomb after receiving Mary Magdalene's remarkable report (John 20:1-10). Later John and the other disciples saw and spoke with the resurrected Christ in the upper room. John was the first to recognize Jesus when He appeared to the 7 apostles at the Sea of Galilee (John 21:7). John also witnessed Jesus ascending from the Mount of Olives into heaven.

III. HIS MINISTRY AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

John was with the other apostles in Jerusalem when they chose Matthias to serve as Judas Iscariot's replacement, and on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fell upon them. In the years that immediately followed, John and Peter worked together to spread the message of Jesus (Acts 3:1). Though likely not as outspoken as Peter, still John was arrested for his bold preaching. He told the authorities that he'd continue to proclaim the name of Jesus, despite their threats of persecution (Acts 4:19). John and Peter traveled to Samaria to help strengthen and establish the new believers that were there (Acts 8:14-15).

John, Peter, and James (the brother of Jesus) were all regarded as pillars of the early New Testament church (Galatians 2:9). It is widely believed that after Jesus' mother Mary died (who John had been taking care of) he left Judea and moved to Ephesus. There he became a prominent leader in the Ephesian church and an active evangelist in the region. He made several acquaintances with area pastors and wrote letters to communicate with and encourage them and their congregations (1st, 2nd, and 3rd John).

Tradition states that the Romans arrested John in Ephesus and condemned him to death. They cast him into a cauldron of boiling oil, yet miraculously he was unharmed. This is reminiscent of the Old Testament story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Having failed to kill him, they exiled him to the small island of Patmos. There are various theories about what John did while he was banished there. While imprisoned on Patmos, John had a God-given vision which he described in the book of Revelation. Most historians believe that John was eventually released, likely due to his old age, and he returned to Ephesus where he died of natural causes sometime around 100 AD.

CONCLUSION

It is generally believed that John was the only apostle who lived to an old age and died of natural causes. I personally believe this occurred because John took good care of Jesus' mother Mary after the crucifixion. He treated her as his own. The 10 Commandments plainly state that those who honor their parents may have their "days prolonged" upon the earth. This assertion is evident in the life of John and provides an adequate explanation for why he seemed invincible at times.

In his writings, the apostle John wrote extensively about God's love as evidenced through Jesus Christ. He was amazed that God could love sinners, such as himself, so completely and so selflessly. John urged all Christians to share this same deep and abiding love with one another. He wrote that God is love, and that those who don't love do not know God. John recognized love as the supreme virtue upon which all others rested. As such, he sought to love others as Christ loves them. May we all do likewise...

Next week we will discuss the first of yet another pair of brothers who were also apostles. There were Peter and Andrew, James and John, and... well, I can't tell you yet. It would spoil the surprise! See you next week.

The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ - Philip

Originally Preached on 2/10/2019

Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!" And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." - Exodus 33:18-20

Good morning. Before we begin, let's do a quick review of the 4 apostles we've already covered... I will give you a brief description and see if you can guess who I am talking about.

This man was a disciple of John the Baptist before he became an apostle of Jesus. He was enthusiastic about introducing others to Christ, including his own brother. He brought a little boy's lunch to Jesus, which the Lord then used to feed 5,000 people. Tradition states that he was crucified on an X-shaped cross. Who was he?

This apostle is often confused with Jesus' brother because they both have the same name and were both prominent leaders in the early church. He was a member of the "inner circle" of apostles. He and his brother sometimes acted inappropriately and had to be chastised by Jesus. He was the first apostle to be martyred, was put to death by the sword, and was the only apostle whose death is actually recorded in the Bible. Who is he?

This apostle may have also been a disciple of John the Baptist prior to meeting Jesus. He is believed to have been the youngest of the apostles. He wrote 5 books of the Bible, in which he often referred to himself anonymously as "the disciple whom Jesus loved". He took care of Jesus' mother Mary after the crucifixion. Tradition states that he moved to Ephesus, survived being cast into a cauldron of boiling oil, was exiled to the island of Patmos, and eventually died of old age. Who was he?

This apostle was known for his impulsive behavior which sometimes got him into trouble. He briefly walked on the water before starting to sink. He was the first apostle to identify Jesus as the Christ. He cut off the ear of the high priest during Jesus' arrest. He denied knowing Jesus 3 times, but was later restored for making these denials. After the resurrection he became the leader of the apostles and a pillar of the New Testament church. Tradition states the he was crucified upside down. Who was he?

Great job! Today's message will highlight the first of yet another pair of apostles who were also brothers. Their names were Philip and Bartholomew. This sermon will be about Philip, and next week we will talk about Bartholomew.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The apostle Philip is not referred to by any other name in the Bible. The name Philip comes from the Greek and it means "he who loves horses". He was well-versed in the Scriptures and may have been able to speak the Greek language. Philip was born in Bethsaida, and therefore was a Galilean like most of the other apostles. His brother Bartholomew was also an apostle. Philip is often mentioned in conjunction with the apostle Andrew, suggesting that they may have been close friends.

When Jesus proposed buying food to feed the crowd of 5,000, Philip objected by stating that the cost would be too high (John 6:5-7). His response shows that Philip was a practical thinker. He also understood things very literally, which sometimes led to confusion. Philip was a helpful person who sought to assist those who were in need.

Philip did not write any of the Bible. He is frequently confused with an evangelist named Philip who was chosen as one of the first deacons of the New Testament church (Acts 6:5). It was this man (Philip the Evangelist), not Philip the Apostle, who preached in Samaria and later baptized an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8).

II. HIS MINISTRY WITH JESUS

Toward the begin of His ministry Jesus traveled to Galilee where he found Philip and called him to become an apostle. Philip quickly went to tell his brother that he'd found the Messiah and urged him to come along also. When his brother expressed doubt about Jesus' identity, Philip challenged him to come and meet Jesus for himself. In the end, both Philip and Bartholomew (also called Nathaniel) became apostles (John 1:43-51).

Several months later Jesus tested Philip with a question during the feeding of the 5,000. Philip did not anticipate the great miracle that Jesus was about to perform. Instead he pointed out that the apostles simply didn't have enough money to buy food for everyone present that day (John 6:1-14). Sometime thereafter Philip listened to the request of some Greeks who wanted to meet Jesus, and then he and Andrew carried their petition to Jesus (John 12:20-26).

On the night of the Last Supper, after Jesus had washed their feet, Jesus began to teach and to comfort the apostles. He told them that He was “the way, the truth, and the life”. Philip was obviously confused by the Lord’s words and so he asked Jesus to show them the Father (God Almighty). Jesus responded by saying that those who had seen Him had seen the Father, for He and the Father were one (John 14:1-11).

Like the other apostles, Philip saw and heard many remarkable things during Jesus’ earthly ministry. Though he is not specifically mentioned that often, he was present with the others during numerous events detailed in the gospels. Philip personally witnessed the resurrected Christ on multiple occasions, including His ascension into Heaven.

III. HIS MINISTRY AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

Philip remained with the apostles in Jerusalem until the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:13). After the Holy Spirit fell upon them, there are various theories about Philip’s life and death. Some historians believe that he journeyed to Scythia, which is modern-day Ukraine, where he boldly preached the gospel message. Others state that he went to Phrygia, located in modern-day Turkey. Perhaps he went to both places for a while.

It is generally agreed that Philip was martyred for his faith in Hierapolis, though the exact method of his execution is disputed. Some say that he was crucified on an abnormally tall cross, others contend that he was stoned to death, and still others believe that he was impaled with iron hooks and hung upside down by his ankles to die of exposure. Whatever the case, Philip’s cause of death was gruesome and cruel.

CONCLUSION

In the opening passage of today’s message, Moses asked to see God. As you may recall, the LORD hid Moses behind a rock and allowed him to see only His backside as He passed by (Exodus 33). In the New Testament, Philip asked a similar question. He wanted Jesus to show him (and the other apostles) the Father. Philip wanted to see God for himself, not realizing that seeing Jesus was the same as seeing the Father. The irony is that Philip was actually looking at God in the flesh while he was asking Him to see God...

But let’s not be too hard on poor Philip. Afterall, his heart’s desire was to see the Father. That’s not a bad thing is it? How many of us truly want to see God? Sure we say we do, but do we really? God’s magnificent holiness is so great that mere mortals can not look upon it and survive. In His glorious presence, all of our hidden secrets are exposed and

our abject sinfulness becomes apparent. One of the ramifications of seeing God is the troubling revelation of our own depravity. Philip wanted to know the truth, even if it made him uncomfortable.

Many people don't want to see or acknowledge the absolute truth of God. They would much rather promote their own ideas as truth, and create a belief system of their own choosing. They are quite happy to allow God to remain unseen. People want to feel good about themselves, but the truth is that we are not good - only God is. Salvation in the name of Jesus Christ is the hope for sinners like you and me.

My prayer for us is that we too have a sincere desire to see God. As the popular praise chorus says, "Open the eyes of my heart LORD, I want to see you." Because the truth is, if we turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full in His wonderful face then the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace!

The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ - Bartholomew

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Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances. But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil. - 1 Thessalonians 5:19-22

Jesus chose 12 men to be his apostles. They were specifically called to serve Him and to help bring about His Father's will. Jesus personally trained and prepared these men. Jesus sent them forth with a mission to make disciples and to share the good news of salvation with the entire world. "The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ" have been the subject of our current sermon series over the past several weeks.

In an earlier message we described and defined the word apostle. There is another word sometimes used in religious jargon that has a similar spelling and sound but a very different meaning. This is the word "apostate". For the sake of clarity, let's make sure we understand the vast differences between an apostle and an apostate.

An apostle is someone who has been "sent". Broadly, it can refer to all of those who have been sent by Jesus to fulfill the Great Commission - past, present, and future. This would include countless missionaries and evangelists. Typically Southern Baptists have defined it in much more limited sense, arguing that it applies only to those whom Jesus personally and specifically named during the New Testament era. According to this definition, the apostles were a relatively small and closed group.

An apostate, on the other hand, is someone who deserts or betrays the faith. Sadly, the Bible speaks about those who already have or someday will turn from their beliefs in Jesus and revert back to their former wickedness. An apostate is not simply experiencing a season of doubt or weakness, but rather has permanently renounced their faith. This regression is called apostasy. Apostates do great harm to the cause and reputation of Christ. There are several warnings in the New Testament about the extreme dangers of apostasy.

Moving on... let's now get into the topic of today's message. We have already talked about Peter, Andrew, James, John, and Philip. This morning we will focus on Bartholomew. He will be the sixth apostle we've covered, meaning that after today we will be halfway through with this series. Are you ready? Let's begin.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Bartholomew is also called Nathanael. They are the same person. The name Bartholomew is used in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Acts whereas the name Nathanael is used only in John. Bartholomew derives from the Greek and means “son of the plowman”. Nathanael is from the Hebrew and means “God has given”. Bartholomew was from Cana of Galilee (John 21:2) and is commonly thought to be Philip’s brother. At the very least they were close friends, like brothers.

Bartholomew was familiar with the Hebrew Scriptures, which suggests he came from a religious background. Jesus referred to him as a man “in whom there was no deceit”, highlighting Bartholomew’s honest nature. He was a faithful man who vocally acknowledged the kingship of Jesus. Bartholomew was also skeptical, not willing to accept things at face value without first checking them out for himself.

Bartholomew didn’t write any of the Bible. There are some ancient writings that have been associated with him such as the Gospel of Bartholomew, the Questions of Bartholomew, and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (by Bartholomew). However, all of these extra-biblical writings are somewhat sensational and each has been thoroughly discredited. They describe such things as Jesus’ descent into Hades after the crucifixion.

II. HIS MINISTRY WITH JESUS

Very little is known about Bartholomew. He is only mentioned in the Scripture a few times. The most developed scene featuring Bartholomew centers around his calling to become an apostle. Jesus came to Galilee and called Philip to follow him. Philip then went and found Bartholomew, presumably his brother, and told him that he’d personally met the Messiah. Bartholomew openly doubted Philip’s assertion that someone from lowly Nazareth could be this promised Savior, but decided to go meet Jesus for himself before completely ruling out the possibility. Though they had never previously met, as Bartholomew approached Jesus the Lord began to accurately describe his character. Then Jesus correctly stated that He’d envisioned Bartholomew sitting under a fig tree earlier when Philip first arrived to speak with him. Bartholomew was amazed that Jesus knew these things, and agreed to follow Him as an apostle. The Lord then predicted that Bartholomew would see many more amazing and miraculous things than these (John 1:43-51).

Some Bible students have speculated that Bartholomew was somehow associated with the wedding at Cana, perhaps even being the groom. After all, he was from Cana and the wedding story immediately follows that of Bartholomew's calling to be an apostle. There is no way to confirm this, but it is an interesting theory. The wedding at Cana was where Jesus performed His first public miracle by turning water into wine (John 2:1-11). Perhaps Jesus had been invited by Bartholomew...

Bartholomew was 1 of the 7 apostles who were present at the breakfast by the sea of Galilee following the Lord's resurrection (John 21:2). On this occasion, he likely helped cast the nets out on the other side of the boat as instructed by Jesus and certainly witnessed the miracle that followed. This was just one of the several times that Bartholomew and the other apostles saw and spoke with the risen Lord.

Bartholomew walked with Jesus throughout His entire 3 years of public ministry and must have experienced many marvelous things. Despite not being mentioned often, Bartholomew must have had an important and necessary role among the apostles. His name might not be well-known, but his service to the Lord was certainly valuable.

III. HIS MINISTRY AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

Bartholomew is included in the final listing of the apostles following Jesus' ascension into Heaven (Acts 1:13). He participated in their selection of Matthias and their prayers leading up to the Day of Pentecost. After the Holy Spirit fell upon them at Jerusalem, Bartholomew - like the others - became an outspoken evangelist who helped carry the message of Jesus to the furthest corners of the earth.

He is believed to have preached in Armenia, and the Armenian church has historically regarded Bartholomew as their founder. Tradition states that he also went to India to proclaim the gospel there. It is widely accepted that Bartholomew was flayed or skinned alive, and possibly beheaded, for his faith. The exact location of Bartholomew's martyrdom is unknown and disputed, but probably occurred in either Armenia or India.

CONCLUSION

I am certain that Bartholomew had many good qualities, but for the sake of today's sermon I want to applaud his healthy skepticism. When Philip first told his brother about Jesus, Bartholomew listened carefully but did not immediately accept Philip's declaration. Bartholomew determined to meet Jesus for himself to judge if He was the real deal or not.

Far too many people, especially Christians, believe whatever their pastor or teacher tells them. The New Testament urges us to compare that which we are being taught with the Scriptures to ensure that it is correct. We are encouraged to test the spirits, because there are many false teachers out there that are mishandling the Word of God. In other words, each and every believer is personally responsible for reading and generally knowing what the Bible says. It is not sufficient to simply take the word of others. Nor is it appropriate for any church to discourage or dissuade its members from reading and/or studying Scripture.

This is not to say that you shouldn't trust your pastor or other spiritual leaders. Who would want to follow a preacher or any other religious authority that they didn't trust? But even though you trust them, it is still important to verify that what they are saying is consistent with the Word of God. Even the wisest Christian is still limited by their humanity, and is subject to make mistakes or have misunderstandings. I'll confess that I have said things in the past from the pulpit that were wrong, and have had to go back and correct myself. Though not intentional, perhaps I have unwittingly led some astray. It is humbling to admit that possibility.

May all of us be like Bartholomew... willing to listen intently, while not being so foolish as to accept everything at face value. May we test the spirits. May we hold fast to a strong and abiding faith, tempered by an appropriate amount of righteous skepticism.

The 12 Apostles of Jesus - Matthew & James the Less

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Thus says the Lord, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the Lord. - Jeremiah 9:23-24

This week I sat down and calculated my income taxes for the past year. Due to the extensive tax legislation that passed last year, there are quite a few changes this time around. Fortunately I was able to figure them out. I do my own taxes each year, and actually kind of enjoy it. Weird I know, but I am a math junkie... I could have been an accountant or maybe an IRS agent.

Last year the IRS notified me that I'd claimed a credit that we didn't qualify for. After a long and arduous process that took several months, I was finally able to show them that I was right and they were wrong. Believe it or not, the IRS actually admitted their mistake and awarded us with the credit. Still, my interactions with the IRS were not fun. Nobody likes dealing with tax-collectors, not now and not centuries ago...

In this morning's message, we are going to highlight 2 apostles rather than just 1. Of course you know what that means... the sermon will be twice as long as usual. Wait! Don't leave. I am just kidding. I promise to have you out of here at the normal time. Today we are going to learn a little bit about Matthew and the other James (there were 2 apostles named James and we've already covered the first one).

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The apostle Matthew is also referred to in Scripture as Levi and is stated to be the son of Alphaeus (Mark 2:14). He lived in Capernaum of Galilee where he worked as a tax collector. The name Matthew comes from the Hebrew and means "gift of God". It is possible that he was the brother of James the Less, as both men had fathers named Alphaeus, but most experts reject this notion believing that the similarity was merely coincidental. The apostle James is almost always called either James the Less, James the Younger, or James the son of Alphaeus (Matthew 10:3) in order to distinguish him from the other more prominent apostle who shared this name (John's brother, the son of Zebedee). James the Less' mother was named Mary, one of the women who followed

Jesus closely, and he had a brother named James/Joseph (Mark 15:40-41). Some speculate that James the Less was in fact Jesus' brother James, but this is highly unlikely (John 7:3-5).

Matthew is described as a hospitable person who invited Jesus to his home where he held a reception in the Lord's honor. He was also penitent, and turned from the dishonest occupation of tax-collecting in order to follow Christ. By so doing, he walked away from a quite lucrative career. It is difficult to describe the character of James the Less because there are no stories specifically involving him in the Bible. Perhaps this indicates that he was a quiet and unassuming person who intentionally stayed out of the limelight.

Assuming that James the Less was not Jesus' brother, he did not write any of the Bible. Some associate him with an early extra-biblical document called "The Gospel of James", but again this is questionable. Matthew, on the other hand, definitely did write a book of the Bible - the gospel of Matthew. This gospel contains the Sermon on the Mount, the Great Commission, and many other important and beloved passages.

II. THEIR MINISTRY WITH JESUS

There is only 1 scene described in the New Testament that specifically involves Matthew. It is told in all 3 synoptic gospels (Matthew 9:9-13, Mark 2:14-17, and Luke 5:27-32). Jesus was walking through the city of Capernaum one day when he passed by the booth of a local tax-collector named Matthew. Jesus called out "Follow Me!" and Matthew immediately left his post and obeyed. This is quite remarkable because, as a tax-collector, Matthew probably had a relatively high income. The Romans employed willing Jews to exact taxes upon their own people to be collected and used by the empire. Jewish tax-collectors were regarded as traitors in Judea because they had sold out their own people on behalf of Rome.

Delighted that he had been chosen as an apostle, Matthew held a large and lavish reception at his home in Jesus' honor. He invited several of his friends, also tax-collectors, and several others who were looked down upon by the Jews. Some pious Pharisees were present also, and they publicly rebuked Jesus for dining with tax-collectors and sinners. Jesus stated that He "had not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance".

James the Less is included in the multiple listings of the apostles found in the New Testament (Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:13-16, Acts 1:13), but does not

appear in any actual stories. Though never directly named, he was certainly present with the other apostles during the numerous events recorded in the gospels. The fact that he is not mentioned does not make him any less important or significant.

Both Matthew and James the Less walked with Jesus for 3 years. They heard His teaching. They witnessed His miracles. They were sent out to spread His message. They grew in their faith. They watched Him being arrested, knew of His crucifixion, and personally saw Him after the resurrection. Matthew and James the Less were there with the disciples when Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives into Heaven and the angels proclaimed that He'd someday return again.

III. THEIR MINISTRY AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

Matthew and James the Less waited in the upper room in Jerusalem with the other disciples until the day of Pentecost. While there they helped select Matthias as Judas Iscariot's replacement. After the Holy Spirit fell upon them, the apostles split up and most traveled to distant places in order to spread the good news of salvation. A few remained in or later returned to Jerusalem. They all become bold and fearless witnesses for Jesus.

Tradition states that Matthew journeyed to several different places including Persia (modern-day Iran), but eventually ended up in the African nation of Ethiopia. Reportedly he was arrested there, impaled on stakes, and then beheaded. Meanwhile, James the Less is believed to have been seized by the Jews and thrown down from the pinnacle of the Temple. Upon hitting the ground, he was subsequently beaten to death. Both men died as Christian martyrs.

CONCLUSION

In all likelihood, before he met Jesus Matthew was an unscrupulous and dishonest man. Tax-collectors of this time were known to grossly overcharge citizens and pocket the extra money for themselves. He was probably despised by his own people, but willing to take the abuse in exchange for personal wealth. Yet when he met Jesus, everything changed immediately. Matthew came under powerful conviction, was sorry for what he'd done, repented of his sinfulness, and walked away from it. What a remarkable transformation!

Truth be told, James the Less has been tagged with a horrible nickname. "The Less" - really? Just because he was not as prominent or as well-known as the other disciples,

does that somehow make him less? I don't think so. As a matter of fact, the more I think about it the more fond I become of this description. After all, we were not created to make a name for ourselves, but rather to proclaim the name of Jesus. We should be making more of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and less of ourselves. Maybe I should call myself Russell the Less as a guard against pride and self-righteousness.

And so I close the message with 2 quick observations. First, we should all strive to show the penitent attitude of Matthew. We should be truly ashamed of and appalled by our sinfulness. This should lead us to genuine repentance. Second, we should embrace the humble anonymity of James the Less who did not seek to garner his own attention, but instead sought to promote Jesus. In her recent contemporary Christian song Francesca Battistelli sings, "I don't need my name in lights, I'm famous in my Father's eyes". Can we and will we take the spotlight off of ourselves and put it on Jesus, where it rightfully belongs?

Next week... Thomas. I hope you'll be here as we continue through this inspirational study together. I confidently anticipate that God will speak to us all through the message, without a doubt.

The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ - Thomas

Originally Preached on 3/3/2019

And He [Jesus] went up on the mountain and summoned those whom He Himself wanted, and they came to Him. And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons. - Mark 3:13-15

This past week I had the great privilege of attending the annual evangelism conference in Dallas. One of the featured speakers was Jim Cymbala, the long-time pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle in New York City. A few years back, we did a Bible study on prayer here at Calvary Baptist Church using some of Jim's videos. His message intrigued me because it involved a passage about the apostles, which of course is our topic right now.

The gospel of Mark tells us why Jesus appointed the apostles. It states that Jesus called them first and foremost to "be with Him". Sure, they were ultimately sent out to preach the gospel and to cast out demons, but before they could do that effectively they needed to spend time with Jesus (Mark 3:13-15). The key to having a successful ministry is simply spending an adequate amount of quality time with the Lord.

Far too many pastors and/or other religious figures spend so much time doing ministry that they neglect their personal time with Christ. As such they eventually become tired, discouraged, jaded, and even depressed. Their families and relationships are negatively impacted as well as their ministries. They become deeply discouraged and weary in well-doing all because they have failed to spend enough personal time with Jesus.

The apostles back then, just as pastors and other Christians today, are called first and most importantly to be with Jesus. The time we spend with Him gives us the strength necessary to serve and to do ministry. Apart from it, we will surely struggle. May we all rearrange our schedules as necessary to ensure that we spend a sufficient amount of quality time each day just being with Jesus.

Today's sermon is the eighth installment of our current series "The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ". We will be discussing Thomas. May God open our eyes and ears to the teaching of His Word.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

The apostle Thomas is also called Didymus and “Doubting Thomas”. The name Didymus derives from the Greek and means “twin”. For this reason, most scholars conclude that Thomas was a twin. Scripture does not provide us with the identity of his twin brother. Perhaps he was another one of the apostles, perhaps not... this as a matter of speculation. Other than this, nothing is known about Thomas’ background or calling.

Thomas was an inquisitive person who didn’t hesitate to ask questions whenever he was confused about something. He was both loyal and faithful. He courageously committed to follow Jesus even unto death. Thomas is probably best known for openly doubting the Lord’s resurrection, but these doubts were short-lived. Though he has been characterized as a doubter, in fact all of the apostles doubted to some degree or another.

None of the Biblical canon is attributed to the authorship of Thomas. However, there are several ancient writings believed to have either been written by him or named after him. These include the Acts of Thomas and the Gospel of Thomas, among others. The Gospel of Thomas purportedly lists several secret sayings or quotations of Christ. These 2 books are highly untrustworthy, and some early Christians described them as spurious and heretical.

II. THOMAS’ MINISTRY WITH JESUS

The first substantial mention of Thomas in Scripture occurs during the final months of Jesus’ earthly ministry. The Lord told the apostles that He was going to Bethany of Judea, where His dear friend Lazarus had just died. Due to its proximity to Jerusalem and knowing the hostility of the Jews that was prevalent there, most of the apostles were likely hesitant to make this potentially dangerous trip. But Thomas courageously spoke up and called for them all to follow Jesus, even if doing so ultimately led to their deaths (John 11:14-16).

Later, on the night of the Last Supper, Jesus was speaking words of comfort to his troubled apostles. He told them that He was going away to prepare a place for them, and that He would someday come again to receive them to Himself. Jesus then declared that they already knew the way. Thomas was confused by the Lord’s statement and basically said, “Jesus, we don’t know where You’re going or how to get there.” In response to Thomas’ honest admission Jesus taught that He alone is the only way to gain entrance into heaven (John 14:1-6).

On the evening of the Lord's resurrection day, Jesus appeared to His disciples in the upper room. For some unknown reason Thomas was not there with them that night. Later, when they told him that they'd seen and spoken with the risen Christ, Thomas simply couldn't believe it. Despite their testimony Thomas still had serious doubts about the resurrection. A week later Jesus appeared in the upper room again, and this time Thomas was present. The risen Jesus addressed Thomas directly and showed him His pierced hands and side. Broken, Thomas repented of his doubts and proclaimed Jesus as his Lord and his God (John 20:19-29).

Thomas was 1 of the 7 apostles who were present with the risen Jesus during the breakfast by the sea (John 21:2). He heard the Great Commission on the mountaintop in Galilee. He saw Jesus ascend into Heaven. Thomas personally walked with and experienced many marvelous things during his time with Jesus.

III. THOMAS' MINISTRY AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

After the ascension, Thomas remained in Jerusalem with the other apostles for approximately 10 days until Pentecost (Acts 1:13). Once anointed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, Thomas left Judea and became a missionary to the nations. He faithfully did his part to carry the message of Jesus to the world.

According to tradition Thomas travelled eastward to India where he worked tirelessly to establish the church. He is known as the Patron Saint of India. Some reports state that he went even farther into Indonesia preaching the message of Christ. It is believed that Thomas died in India as a martyr after being stabbed with a spear. This is ironic considering that Thomas is often remembered for wanting to see and touch Jesus' spear-pierced side.

CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, many people remember Thomas as a doubter. But can I ask you, who among us has never doubted? If we are honest, all of us must admit to doubting in God from time to time. I am reminded of the story in which a father brought his ailing son to Jesus. The boy suffered from severe seizures, and the Lord's disciples had been unable to help him. Jesus assured the father that He could heal the child, saying that "All things are possible to him who believes". The father emotionally responded, "I do believe; help my unbelief." This remarkable statement reveals that even believers harbor doubts (Mark 9:14-29).

Rather than criticize the negative, I want to accentuate the positive. Thomas was an honest and transparent person who did not try to hide or cover-up his weaknesses. Whenever he was confused about Jesus' teachings he spoke up and asked questions. Whenever he had doubts or reservations about something, he expressed them and made them known. Thomas did not try to keep these things to himself, but openly confessed them. As he did so, Jesus was able to address Thomas' weaknesses and strengthen his knowledge and faith.

All too often we as Christians would rather stay silent than risk asking a question that might make us appear foolish. In similar fashion, we often pretend that we are confident in the ways and the will of God when in fact we are consumed with doubt. In these instances, we should learn from Thomas to honestly admit our misunderstandings and misgivings. This invites Jesus to come with the answers we seek and to bolster our wavering faith.

In our next sermon, we will highlight 2 of the lesser known apostles. Their names are Simon the Zealot and Thaddeus. Until then, may our lives be an open book so that others might see the strength of God magnified through our many weaknesses.

The 12 Apostles of Jesus - Simon the Zealot & Thaddaeus

Originally Preached on 3/17/2019

“What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ” - 1 John 1:3

Good morning. Today we will continue our series on “The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ”. This message will shine the spotlight on 2 of the lesser known apostles, namely Simon the Zealot and Thaddaeus. Probably most people, including many Christians, would be unable to come up with these 2 names if asked to list all 12 of Jesus’ apostles. After today, hopefully we will be able to remember and recognize them.

Before we begin our discussion, I want to point out a common division that is made among the apostles. In each of the listings found in the gospels, the apostles’ names are always presented in 3 distinct groups. These groupings are believed to have a particular significance.

The first group is Peter, Andrew, James, and John. Of the 12, these 4 men definitely had the closest and most intimate fellowship with Jesus. They are each mentioned several times in Scripture. As presented earlier in this series, Peter, James, and John are known as “the inner circle”. They often got to go with Jesus to experience things that the other apostles did not. On occasion Andrew was included with them (Mark 13:3).

The second group is made up of Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, and Thomas. These 4 apostles enjoyed a strong, healthy fellowship with Jesus. There is a fair amount of information about each of them in the gospels, including several quotations which they spoke. However, most Bible scholars think that they were not as close to Jesus as the first group.

The third group consists of James the Less, Simon the Zealot, Thaddaeus, and Judas Iscariot. Other than Judas Iscariot, who is mentioned at length only because he betrayed Jesus, there is virtually no information given about these men. These 4 are thought to have had the most limited fellowship with Jesus among the apostles.

All 12 apostles enjoyed a special relationship with Jesus. They walked with Him for 3 years and witnessed many amazing things. That said, they all had different levels of

fellowship and intimacy with Him. Some were very close companions to Jesus, while others appeared to be more distant.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Simon the Zealot is also referred to in the gospels as Simon the Canaanite or Simon the Cananaean. In this instance Canaanite is being used in its political sense, and does not refer to Simon's place of origin. Here the term Canaanite is synonymous with the word Zealot. Simon was a member of the militant political movement called the Zealots. Simon the Zealot is not to be confused with the more well-known apostle Simon Peter (Peter), Simon the Leper (of Bethany), Simon of Cyrene (who help Jesus carry the cross), Simon Iscariot (the father of Judas Iscariot), Simon the Magician (who sought to duplicate the apostles' miracles), or Simon the Tanner (who provided shelter for Peter in Joppa).

Thaddaeus or Lebbaeus were nicknames of the apostle Judas. He is also called Judas the son of James or simply Jude. As in the case of Simon, there is little information in the Bible about Thaddaeus. His nickname comes from the Aramaic and means "beloved" or "near to the heart". Thaddaeus, whose actual name was Judas, is sometimes confused with Judas Iscariot (another of the apostles), Judas of Galilee (a false teacher), Judas of Damascus (who helped Ananias find the blinded Paul), Judas Barsabbas (a prominent member of the Jerusalem church), or Jude (one of Jesus' brothers).

Simon the Zealot was an ultra-patriotic Jew who was fiercely loyal to his people. He was passionately committed to the cause of throwing off Roman authority. Thaddaeus expressed curiosity and even seemed confused about some of Jesus' teachings. The meaning of his nickname suggests that the other apostles found Thaddaeus to be a likeable, friendly person.

Neither of these 2 apostles wrote any portion of the Bible. It is widely accepted that the short New Testament book of Jude was written by Jesus' younger brother. Seeing that Jesus' brothers did not accept Him as the Messiah until after the resurrection, it is almost certain that Judas the apostle (aka Thaddaeus) was a different person entirely.

II. THEIR MINISTRY WITH JESUS

There are no stories recorded in Scripture that mention Simon the Zealot. There are no Biblical quotations attributed to him. Some think that he may have been the bridegroom

at the wedding in Cana, but this is unverifiable. For certain, he either was or had been a member of an early fanatical political movement called the Zealots. This group fervently, and sometimes violently, pursued independence from Roman rule and actively sought to stir up Jewish rebellion. The Zealots practiced guerilla-like tactics to create strife and were known to stab and kill Romans and/or sympathizers if possible. Many people thought of them as terrorists.

On the night of the Last Supper, just before they departed from the Upper Room to go pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus told the apostles to start carrying weapons for their own protection. They looked around the room and found 2 small swords or daggers. Later that night, during Jesus arrest, Peter used 1 of them to cut off a man's ear. It seems most reasonable that the other knife belonged to Simon the Zealot (Luke 22:35-38).

There is only one instance in the gospels that directly involves Thaddaeus. During their discussion on the night of the Last Supper, Jesus taught that He would disclose Himself only to those who loved Him and kept His commandments. Thaddaeus remembered the triumphal entry from just a few days before when Jesus had been welcomed by the masses and hailed as the long-awaited king. He wondered what had changed over the course of the week that would cause Jesus to make such a strange statement (John 14:18-24). Thaddaeus obviously misunderstood Jesus' true intentions. Like most first century Jews, he was expecting the Messiah to reveal Himself in power to the whole world.

Simon the Zealot and Thaddaeus shared in the numerous experiences of the other apostles. After the resurrection, both men were witnesses of the risen Christ. They saw Jesus ascend into Heaven and subsequently became bold advocates of the gospel message.

III. THEIR MINISTRY AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

When all of the remaining apostles waited in Jerusalem for the coming of the Holy Spirit, Thaddaeus and Simon the Zealot were there (Acts 1:13). They partook in the discussion and final decision to name Matthias as Judas Iscariot's replacement. Afterwards, these 2 men departed from Jerusalem in differing directions to proclaim the Kingdom of God.

According to tradition Simon the Zealot made his way to Persia, which is modern-day Iran. There are differing accounts of his death, but some believe he was martyred (perhaps by crucifixion) for refusing to sacrifice to the sun god. Tradition suggests that

Thaddaeus journeyed to Edessa, a region of modern-day Turkey, where he preached the gospel and performed miracles. He may have been clubbed or axed to death for his faith.

CONCLUSION

The contrast between Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax-collector is quite stark. Simon had a deep allegiance to his Jewish kinsmen and was bitterly opposed to Rome. On the other hand, Matthew betrayed his Jewish heritage in deference to Roman authority by serving as their employee. This vast disparity clearly indicates the variety that existed among the apostles. Jesus chose 12 very different men with very different backgrounds and perspectives.

One of the lessons we can learn from Simon the Zealot is that we must lay our political agendas and ambitions at the foot of the cross. This is not to say that we can't have our own opinions about how governments should operate, but these must always be secondary to the gospel. The Bible calls us to live at peace with one another, yet all too often we fight about and are bitterly divided over politics. This simply should not be...

Thaddaeus was a curious fellow who apparently misunderstood what Jesus' mission was all about (In his defense, so did most people). That said, by asking questions he was able to learn and grow. His inquisitive nature allowed him refine his theology and to mature in the faith, thus proving to be an admirable quality. We should imitate this.

Next week we will look at the last of Jesus' 12 original apostles and learn about the man that replaced him. Until then, have a blessed week.

The 12 Apostles of Jesus - Judas Iscariot and Matthias

Originally Preached on 3/24/2019

“Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men.” - Titus 3:1-2

We are nearing the end of our series on “The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ”. This morning we will talk about Judas Iscariot and his replacement, Matthias. Next week we will conclude this collection of sermons with a final message on the apostle Paul.

Early on in this study I challenged you all to memorize the names of the apostles. Today I want to give you a tool that might help you remember their names. It is an acrostic that I made up for myself some time ago. You might find it to be a bit silly, but this acrostic is helpful to me and perhaps it will be to you also...

In 1983 the pop sensation Michael Jackson was at the height of his popularity. Songs like Thriller, Beat It, and Billie Jean were dominating the billboard charts. That fall the beverage company Pepsi signed Michael (and his brothers) to do a TV commercial on their behalf. During the filming of the commercial in January of 1984, a special effects explosion went wrong on stage and Michael Jackson’s hair caught on fire. His scalp was severely burned. This mishap was broadcast widely throughout the media and is seared (pun intended) into my childhood memory. That said, here is my bizarre acrostic:

Pepsi Asked Janet Jackson’s Popular Brother Michael To Joyfully Sing Their Jingle...
“Michael, Please?”

The first letters of each word in this statement are P, A, J, J, P, B, M, T, J, S, T, J, M, P. These letters represent the 12 original apostles and the 2 additional apostles we’ve included in this series. Can you name them with me?

Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James the Less, Simon the Zealot, Thaddaeus, and Judas Iscariot; also Matthias and Paul.

Of all the preachers in the world, you are stuck with the guy who talks about Michael Jackson’s burning hair. I wonder sometimes how you put up with me... In my defense, I can name the apostles without any difficulty. Okay, enough of that. Let’s get started.

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Judas Iscariot is sometimes called Judas the son of Simon or Judas the Betrayer. His father's name was Simon. The surname Iscariot is thought to reference Kerieth, a region or town in Judea. The generally held view is that all of the 12 original apostles were from Galilee, except for Judas Iscariot (from Judea). During Jesus' earthly ministry, Judas served as the treasurer of the group and was responsible for carrying and managing their money. Matthias was not an original apostle, but he was a member of the larger group of disciples who faithfully followed Jesus throughout His ministry. As such, he was well known by Jesus and the 12. No other names are used for Matthias in the Bible.

Money was very important to Judas Iscariot. He was both greedy and dishonest. The Bible calls him as a thief because he regularly stole from the disciples' money bag. He was also treacherous in his betrayal Jesus. In the end Judas Iscariot was remorseful, but never repentant. On the other hand, Matthias was a faithful follower of Christ. He was willing to serve in whatever capacity that was needed.

Neither of these 2 men wrote any part of the Bible itself. That said, the early Christian theologian Clement of Alexandria cited writings ascribed to or at least named after Matthias. These are called the Gospel of Matthias and/or the Traditions of Matthias. Some believe them to be one and the same document. While references to them have been preserved, the actual writings of Matthias (if any) have been lost.

II. THEIR MINISTRY WITH JESUS

After preaching a difficult message that had resulted in many disciples withdrawing from Him, Jesus reminded the 12 apostles that He'd specifically chosen them. His words revealed that He already knew that 1 of them would eventually betray Him (John 6:66-71). He was, of course, referring to Judas Iscariot. The evening before His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, Mary of Bethany anointed Jesus' feet with expensive perfume. Judas Iscariot complained that her action was a waste of valuable resources that could have been sold to feed the poor, but in fact he just wanted the money so that he could steal a portion of it (John 12:1-6).

During the final week of Jesus' earthly life, Judas conspired with the chief priests to deliver the Savior over to them. He agreed to betray the Lord in exchange for 30 pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14-16). The following evening, the night of the Last Supper, Judas left the meal early to inform the chief priests of Jesus' whereabouts and plans (John

13:21-30). They wanted to arrest Him privately and out of view. Judas led a cohort of Jewish and Roman authorities to the Garden of Gethsemane (in the dark of night) where Jesus had taken the other apostles to pray. He then betrayed Jesus with a kiss, and the chief priests and elders took Christ into custody (Matthew 26:47-50).

The next morning Judas Iscariot heard that Jesus had been condemned to crucifixion. He was filled with remorse and regret. He hurriedly returned the 30 pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders hoping to undo his treachery, but it was too late. These religious leaders didn't care about the money; they just wanted Jesus gone, by whatever means necessary. Devastated by the tragic consequences of his betrayal, Judas Iscariot went out and committed suicide (Matthew 27:3-5).

Matthias was 1 of the many disciples who followed Jesus, but he wasn't one of the original 12 apostles. Jesus commissioned 70 of these disciples to go out ahead of Him in pairs and to preach the gospel in various cities. Though not specifically named, it is highly likely that Matthias took part in this evangelistic effort (Luke 10:1). Little else is known about Matthias, as there are no direct references to him in the gospels.

III. THEIR MINISTRY AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

Judas Iscariot did not live to see the crucifixion, the resurrection, or the ascension. He did not experience the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. He killed himself prior to all of this, and therefore had no ministry after Jesus' departure. It was his suicide that led to the apostleship of Matthias.

After witnessing the ascension of Christ, about 120 of Jesus' followers - including the apostles - gathered in Jerusalem for prayer. Referring to the Psalms of David, Peter stood up and proposed that they should select a replacement for Judas Iscariot. 2 men were nominated for the position. The brethren prayed and then drew lots. This resulted in Matthias being chosen to fill the spot that had been vacated (Acts 1:26).

Like the others, the new apostle Matthias was filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. There are various theories as to what happened next. One tradition states that Mathias journeyed to Damascus and proclaimed the gospel to those living there. Eventually he returned to Judea, and was ultimately stoned to death in Jerusalem for his faith.

CONCLUSION

In the past, I have heard people debate whether or not Judas Iscariot went to Heaven. Some argue that Judas never intended for physical harm to come to Jesus, was greatly sorrowful about his betrayal, and simply made an innocent yet tragic mistake. Though this may be true, Jesus clearly declared that Judas was not saved. After washing the disciples' feet, Jesus plainly stated that Judas Iscariot was "not clean". When understood in the context of the passage, it is obvious that Judas had never been washed of his sins, was still lost, and therefore had no part with Jesus (John 13:5-11). What's more, despite his terrible guilt, there is no evidence that Judas Iscariot ever repented after committing his traitorous act. If he had, why kill himself? As such, I strongly believe that Judas Iscariot was condemned to Hell.

Matthias was a willing servant who stepped into the role of an apostle when called to do so. He was eager and ready to serve. Judas Iscariot was a liar who may have fooled the apostles, but never fooled Jesus. His life shows us that someone can associate closely with Jesus and his followers while never being saved. The Lord knowingly and purposely chose Judas in order to fulfill His divine plan of redeeming humanity.

The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ - Paul

Originally Preached on 3/31/2019

“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession;” - Hebrews 3:1

This morning we will finish our series on “The 12 Apostles of Jesus Christ”. This final message centers on the apostle Paul. Like Matthias, Paul was not 1 of the original 12 apostles. His apostleship didn’t even begin until after Jesus’ ascension into Heaven. That said, Jesus personally appeared to Paul and called him to become an apostle. For this reason, Paul referred to himself as being “untimely born” (Romans 1:1, 1 Corinthians 15:8).

I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Before his conversion the apostle Paul went by his Hebrew name Saul. He was born sometime around 5 A.D. in Tarsus, a Roman city located in Asia Minor. His parents were of Jewish descent, and therefore Paul was both a Jew and a Roman citizen by birth. During his youth Paul was sent to Palestine where he received the best religious training available. He studied under the renowned teacher and Pharisee Gamaliel and became an expert in Jewish laws and customs. Even as a young man, Paul was well known by the Sanhedrin and respected among the Pharisees.

Scripture portrays Paul as a man who was passionately committed to causes. During his years as a Pharisee, he was zealous in preserving, promoting and protecting his Jewish orthodoxy against any and all threats. This led him to heavily persecute believers (Acts 8:3). After his miraculous conversion to Christianity, this same level of uncompromising determination was apparent in Paul’s continuous efforts to spread the gospel message and to establish/strengthen new churches.

Paul is credited with writing at least 13 books of the New Testament. They are Romans, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. All of these books are in fact letters, or epistles, that were written to various Christian churches or individuals. Together Paul’s writings constitute almost half of the New Testament.

II. PAUL’S LIFE DURING JESUS’ MINISTRY

Paul was about 7 years younger than Jesus. Thus, when Jesus began his earthly ministry at age 30 Paul was in his early 20's. Most likely he was still completing his religious education and training. The Bible never specifically mentions Paul seeing or encountering Jesus during these years, but there are several confrontations between the Lord and unnamed Pharisees. It is possible, and even likely, that young Paul knew who Jesus was.

As Jesus' reputation grew and the number of His followers increased, He became a threat to the traditional Jewish leaders. They believed that He was committing blasphemy by claiming to be God and leading people astray with His message of salvation by grace through faith. The Pharisees, Sadducees, elders, high priests, and other religious elites wanted Him silenced. In order to suppress Jesus' impact, they began to oppress those who accepted and embraced His teachings. This mistreatment grew even more severe after Jesus' crucifixion, and Paul (Saul) became known as a fierce and feared persecutor of early Christians.

In short, Paul did not have a ministry during Jesus' earthly life. On the contrary, He was bitterly opposed to the teachings of Christ and actively sought to undermine them. Later in his life, he looked back upon these days with much sorrow.

III. PAUL'S LIFE AFTER JESUS WAS GONE

The first direct mention of Paul (Saul) in the Bible takes place during the stoning of Stephen. This event occurred a few years after Jesus' ascension. Paul (Saul) was present at and wholeheartedly consented with the unwarranted execution of Stephen (Acts 7:58). In the wake of this killing, the fearful church scattered across Judea, Samaria, and to other more distant locations (Acts 8:1).

Paul (Saul) actively sought and received permission to go to Damascus to arrest the Christians who'd fled there. Along the way, he had a miraculous encounter with Jesus during which he was temporarily blinded. Even still, he made his way on to Damascus. While staying in the city a disciple of Jesus named Ananias came to him and restored his sight. Paul became a believer and was baptized. In the days that followed he began preaching in Damascus. When a plot to kill him was discovered, the disciples there sent him to Jerusalem. He did not receive a warm reception in Jerusalem either and was ultimately sent away to Tarsus (Acts 9:1-30). During his time away (which took him to several locations) Paul's faith and understanding of Christianity grew stronger.

Some years later, Barnabas went to retrieve Paul from Tarsus and brought him back to the Christian church in Antioch. Paul preached for a full year in Antioch. Then a prophecy was given about a coming famine in Judea, so Paul and Barnabas took an offering from the Antioch church to the elders in Jerusalem (Acts 11:25-30).

Over the next several years, Paul made 3 extended missionary journeys (Acts 12:1-21:16). He traveled to locations throughout Galatia, Macedonia, Greece, and elsewhere. He planted several churches as he went and helped to disciple many Christians in these places. While Paul certainly didn't neglect Jewish believers, his primary ministry was to the Gentiles who tended to receive him as his message more readily. Paul stayed in contact with these churches through written letters and by making additional personal visits when possible. Paul even took up a collection from these churches to give to the struggling saints in Judea. His companions during these various trips included Barnabas, Silas, Luke, Timothy, and many others.

At the end of his 3rd missionary journey, Paul returned to Jerusalem where he was arrested. When an assassination plot against him was uncovered, Paul was moved to Caesarea and imprisoned there for a few years. Finally Paul appealed his case to Caesar and was taken to Rome. He was placed under house arrest in the capital city for a few years. During his confinement, Paul continued to preach to any and all who would listen (Acts 21:17-28:31). Upon his release, it is believed that Paul went on at least 1 additional missionary journey. Many scholars believe that he traveled to Spain and there is even some evidence, albeit inconclusive, that he preached in England. Ultimately Paul was arrested again and beheaded by order of the evil Emperor Nero in Rome sometime around 68 A.D.

CONCLUSION

Volumes have been written about Paul's life. Entire sermon series have been devoted to it. Today we have presented a mere overview of his many exploits and adventures. Suffice it to say, the apostle Paul was arguably the greatest Christian missionary of all time. Despite harsh criticism, skepticism, and ongoing persecution Paul doggedly carried the message of Jesus to numerous people throughout and even beyond the borders of the Roman Empire. His role in spreading and establishing the early Christian church cannot be overstated.

I want to conclude this series by reviewing some of the major character traits that were evident in the apostles. They were great men who set a wonderful example for us to follow.

As Christians, may we all...

- Practice the daring faith of Peter who climbed out of the boat and briefly walked on water
- Be fueled by the contagious enthusiasm of Andrew who eagerly introduced others to Jesus
- Walk with the determined courage of James who was the first apostle to be martyred
- Share the compassionate love of John who cared for Jesus' aging mother after the crucifixion
- Possess the ardent hope of Philip who longed to see the Father and to know Him more
- Apply the keen discernment of Bartholomew who wanted to meet Jesus for himself
- Show the genuine penitence of Matthew who turned from his past sinfulness and walked away
- Display the transparent honesty of Thomas who openly admitted his reservations and doubt
- Embrace the modest humility of James the Less who served quietly in the background
- Adopt the intentional peacefulness of Simon the Zealot who forsook a divisive political agenda
- Express the childlike curiosity of Thaddaeus who asked Jesus to give an explanation
- Shun the sinful rebellion of Judas Iscariot who betrayed the Lord for 30 pieces of silver
- Maintain the willing readiness of Matthias who stepped up when needed to become an apostle
- Press on with the unyielding perseverance of Paul who carried the gospel to the Gentiles

but above all...

Imitate Jesus Christ who is the source of, the object of, and/or the reason for every godly characteristic that these apostles or any of us will ever have.