

Jesus Commissions Disciples  
Matthew 28: 16-20

Two years ago we discovered a wonderful streaming series created by Dallas Jenkins called “The Chosen.” The high-quality episodes take a fresh look at Jesus and those he influenced in his day. We ran a church weekly study of it last fall, and the next installment is being shipped to me this week so we can offer it again one day, perhaps in person. But today, as we consider some of the greatest words to come from the mouth of the Savior, words that we call “The Great Commission:” *we will look at the people Jesus persuaded to follow him*. What were they like? Did they have extraordinary qualities? We know that Jesus from his childhood was aware of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, named after the Twelve Sons of Jacob. And can you believe that Jacob also had a daughter named Dinah who, by patriarchal custom, had no role in God’s plan to create the tribes and the priests? Those sons were not extra special in any way, they were just—and hold on here—born to Jacob through his two wives and two concubines—goodness! Last year I received a gift to Ancestry.com and have followed the procedures to find others in my family tree. Genealogy can be revealing! Just two weeks ago, I saw in the local paper that a man named Sumner died and was being buried in Deland. In my research it appears that his great-great grandfather and my father’s great-great grandfather were brothers! What a small world! Today, we will consider the Twelve who said “yes” to Jesus’ invitation to follow him. The bond that ties them to us seems to just be Jesus’ invitation, both to them and to us.

Although each gospel records slightly different names for the Twelve, today we will use Matthew’s list. Here is the passage: “When morning came, [Jesus] called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them whom he designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew,

Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.” [Matthew 10: 1-4]

Some information about those twelve has to be extrapolated from historical and biblical accounts, but according to several researchers, this is what we know.

**Simon Peter-** was a fisherman; his brother was Andrew. Jesus named him “the Rock” when he declared Jesus to be “The Christ, the Son of the Living God.” He was often the spokesman for the others, but he could also be impulsive. Once he declared that he would never leave Jesus, yet in Jesus’ time of need, Simon Peter denied knowing him three times. Peter broke down and wept, and Jesus went to the cross. But the story did not end there; a risen Jesus addressed Simon (his given name) again in the Gospel of John and asked him three times if he loved him. Simon said three times that he did, symbolically undoing the three denials. Peter is known as the Patron Saint of the Roman Catholic Church as, by tradition, he traveled to Rome to help supervise the early ministries of Christianity.

**Andrew-** was a fisherman like his brother Simon called Peter; he was from Bethsaida but stayed with Jesus in Capernaum; he was first a disciple of John the Baptist, and he witnessed Jesus’ own baptism by John. He told Jesus about the boy who had some bread and fish at the feeding of the 5000. Others came to him for advice, particularly Philip.

**James-** son of Zebedee, brother of the apostle John. In Mark’s gospel Jesus calls James and John “Sons of Thunder,” in part because of their fiery temper. James’ martyrdom is recorded in the book of Acts.

**John-** received the call from Jesus along with his brother as they were mending their fishing nets. They responded to Jesus’ invitation immediately. In his gospel, John humbly refers to himself as “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Jesus’ trust in him was evident when he asked John to care for his mother as Jesus hung on the cross.

**Philip**-came from Bethsaida like Peter and Andrew did. Although we credit a man named Philip with baptizing the Ethiopian in Acts 8, it is not certain that he is the apostle. Sadly, Jesus once said this to Philip toward the end of his ministry: “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still do not know me?”

**Bartholomew**- many believe that the Nathaniel listed in John’s gospel is the same person as Bartholomew in Matthew’s gospel. It seems that Jesus considered him to be a very sincere man, a “guileless one.” Scholar William Barclay believes this is a man’s last name, and Nathanael is perhaps his first name. Bar means “son of” and so it could mean “Son of Tolomai.” This is the only information we have on Bartholomew by tying him to the man John calls Nathanael.

**Thomas**- his name is Aramaic for “twin,” also called “Didymus.” Sadly, Thomas is most remembered for doubting. Upon Jesus’ return to the Upper Room when Thomas was not there, Jesus reappeared to allow Thomas to touch his hands and side to believe. Otherwise, it was believed that Thomas was loyal and strong, but as we have learned in our own day, one bad report can obscure an otherwise upright life.

**Matthew**- also known as Levi. He was a tax collector; tax collectors were despised and not trusted-some consider him a strange choice to follow Jesus. But plenty of other people have put aside a former life to start new Christian lives. Matthew was socially awkward or socially outcast or both. Yet Jesus looked into his heart and saw a man who could be redeemed.

**James the son of Alphaeus**- like in our day, some people in the Bible had the same name as others. Some believe that he and “James, brother of the Lord” were one and the same person. Nothing is certain about him in the gospels.

**Jude-is also known as Thaddeus.** There is no certainty that he penned the letter that bears his name in the New Testament. Isn’t it interesting that, of the Twelve, like twelve ordinary people, some are mainly just there, some do good works, some advise others, and some are obstructionists?

**Simon-** is sometimes referred to as “The Zealot,” perhaps to differentiate him from Simon Peter. The Zealots were militant and tried to instigate Jewish rebellions against Rome. Simon, again, was an interesting choice for Jesus to make, but perhaps not as interesting as his choice of Judas Iscariot.

**Judas Iscariot-** he was the only Judean among the Twelve; the rest were Galileans. His betrayal of Jesus marked him for life and apparently haunted his soul; some accounts say he hanged himself out of remorse for his deed.

The book of Acts records that after Judas’ death by his own hand—he was not blackballed or censured—there were 11 Apostles. The tradition was that there should be twelve. The eleven cast a vote for Matthias, so he was not personally invited by Jesus. We know nothing much about him, but unofficially it is clear that Mary of Magdala, Johanna wife of Chuza (Herod’s steward,) and a woman named Susanna all followed Jesus, providing for him out of their resources. So Jesus welcomed women to follow him, and Jesus invited little children to come to him according to Matthew 19:14.

Today as we hear Jesus give his great commission again to “go and make disciples of all nations,” consider the invitation to be for you too. You do not have to be extraordinary; none of the Twelve was particularly extraordinary. You can be extroverted or introverted; impulsive or reserved; someone of means, someone of poverty, or somewhere in between. If you have accepted his invitation to follow him, *today you can take the next step: you can go into the world and make disciples of others!* How do we practically do that? We tell others stories about our own faith; we invite others to accompany us to a Bible study or to a service where a sermon can teach the Word. Doing those things, we are always inviting others, just as Jesus did. And on occasions like today, we get to revisit the great commission. May you say “yes,” or reaffirm your “yes” to the invitation *and* the commission.

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