

## Week of February 20 - 26

### Commission of the Twelve (Matthew 10:1-42; Mark 6:7-11; Luke 9:1-5)

Jesus went into the hills by himself and prayed through the night. The next morning, he summoned twelve of his followers and gave them the authority and ability to cast out unclean spirits and heal all types of physical, mental, and emotional sickness. Their names were Simon (also called Peter because it means rock, and his brother Andrew; James and John, the sons of Zebedee, whom he referred to as the sons of thunder because of their raging tempers, Philip, Bartholomew, and Thomas; Matthew, the tax agent; James the son of Alphaeus, and his brother Judas who went by his Greek name Lebbaeus Thaddeus; Simon the Canaanite fanatic; and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

As he went about teaching in nearby villages, Jesus blessed these twelve with power over demonic influences and sent them out in pairs to heal the sick and tell people about the coming kingdom of God. He told them to be as sensitive to others as he had been to them. "Look for the lost sheep of the nation of Israel and avoid going to anyone else. Take nothing with you; no money, no food, no overcoat, no tools or supplies because a good worker can always earn his keep. Always find a worthy house to stay in as long as you are in the area. Bless every house you enter with warm greetings. Be comfortable wherever you are well received. If someone isn't receptive to your message, shake the dust off your shoes and move on. On Judgment day, it will be harder for them than it was on Sodom and Gomorrah.

"Be alert! I am sending you out like sheep into a pack of wolves. Be as elusive as snakes and as gentle as doves. Be cautious of men who make accusations and chastise you in the name of their religion. Don't be concerned about what to tell them. It will come to you when you need it because the Holy Spirit will see that you say the right thing at the right time.

"Your brothers will turn on you, asking for your execution. Fathers will turn on children, and children will oppose their parents. Everyone will despise you because you associate with me. If you persevere, you will be spared.

When they persecute you in one place, go somewhere else. You'll have enough places to go to occupy your time until I rejoin you. You aren't above your Master. Nor is a servant above his boss. A disciple is expected to be like his Master and a servant like his boss. Fear no one. Threats will be revealed, and secrets exposed. What I tell you in private, declare openly. What you heard whispered, you should proclaim from the rooftops. Don't be afraid of those who can only kill your bodies – but can't touch your souls; only fear him who can destroy both body and soul in Hell.

"You can buy two sparrows for a dollar, but neither can fall to the ground without your Heavenly Father knowing it. He knows every hair on your head, so don't worry. You're far more valuable than an entire flock of sparrows. If you acknowledge me before men, I will claim you before my Father.

"Don't think my mission is to resolve conflict on Earth. Lining up with me sets a man at odds with his father and a daughter at odds with her mother, and sets a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

"A man's worse enemies may be those of his own household. Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me isn't worthy of me. Anyone who loves his child more than me doesn't

deserve my love. If he isn't willing to make a hard sacrifice to follow me, he won't be able to keep up with me.

"If a man clings to his life, he will lose it, but if he gives it up for me, he will save it. And when a man welcomes me, he is welcoming my Father. If a man welcomes a prophet, he gets what the prophet has to offer. If a man welcomes godly men because of their godliness, he will be given a reward like theirs. And, finally, anyone who gives a little encouragement to someone who decides to start following me will be rewarded."

### **Death of John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:7-9)**

Herod heard what was going on and wanted to meet Jesus himself. Hearing about the miracles, feared John the Baptist's spirit was now in Jesus. Herod had killed John for publicly criticizing him when he moved in with his brother's wife.

Herod arrested John to silence him, but he was afraid to execute him because all the people thought John was a prophet. At Herod's birthday party, Herodias made her daughter dance for Herod, and he promised her anything she wanted. At her mother's request, the daughter asked for John's head on a platter, trapping Herod in front of his friends. Regretting his promise, Herod beheaded John and gave the head to his stepdaughter, who, in turn, gave it to her mother. John's disciples retrieved his body, gave it a proper burial, then sent word to Jesus.

### **The Five Thousand Fed (Matthew 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-13)**

When Jesus' disciples returned, they reported their activities to him. But after hearing about John, they decided to take a break and get alone privately, sailing to a secluded place, but a great crowd followed them. When the boat arrived, the crowd was already there. Jesus looked on them as sheep without a shepherd and instructed and encouraged them as he healed the sick.

Passover was nearing. The disciples told Jesus to send the crowd away so they could go home and buy bread to celebrate the holiday. But Jesus said, "Let's feed them." "It would take a fortune to feed this many," Phillip responded. "What do we have," Jesus asked. "There's a young boy with two fish and five loaves of barley bread, but that won't make a dent," said Peter. Jesus told them to bring it to him.

There were five thousand men there, not including women and children. Jesus had them sit down, then prayed over the fish and loaves and asked his disciples to distribute them. There was enough to eat with twelve basketsful remaining. The people were excited and determined Jesus was the promised one referred to in the Old Testament.

### **Jesus Walks on the Water (Matthew 14:22-33; Mark 6:45-52; John 6:14-21)**

Knowing that they intended to seize him and make him king, he dismissed the crowd, sent the disciples across the lake to Bethsaida, then he went into the mountains to get alone and pray. They sailed through the night, and at dawn, a sudden storm arose and tossed the ship on the waves. When they were seven or eight miles out, they saw Jesus approaching as though he would go right past them, walking on water. They thought he might be some spirit, and it scared them until Jesus yelled, "Hello, it's me. Don't be afraid." Peter answered back, "Lord, if it's really you, let me walk on water to meet you." "Come on," Jesus replied. So, Peter stepped out of the boat and walked toward Jesus, but as he fought the waves, he began to sink. "Lord, save me!" he screamed. Immediately, Jesus grabbed his hand and said, "You of little faith. What caused you

to doubt?" No sooner had they returned to the boat than the storm ended, and soon they came ashore. As though Jesus' miracle with the loaves hadn't been enough, now they had no problem believing Jesus was truly the Son of God.

### **Jesus is the Bread of Life (John 6:22-40)**

The next day people were still lingering in Tiberius ten miles from where Jesus fed them. Seeing the disciples sail away without Jesus, they went looking for him, finding him at the synagogue in Capernaum a few miles south of where the disciples docked.

"How did you get here? they asked. "You don't care how I got here. You only want to be fed. Why be so preoccupied with physical things? Focus on spiritual things I can give you. God, my Father, has sent me for this very purpose." They asked how they could please God, and Jesus told them to trust the One he sent. "How can we be sure God sent you?" they asked.

Jesus replied, "The Scriptures say our ancestors ate manna in the wilderness which God gave them from Heaven. The bread Moses provided was not the true bread of Heaven. The true bread is the one who came from Heaven and feeds life to the world." The people told Jesus that was the bread they wanted. "I am the Bread of Life. If you join me, you will never hunger again. And if you trust in me, you will never thirst again. You have seen what I can do, but you still don't fully trust me. Those my Father sends will come to me, and I will never reject one of them. I am not here to do what I want, but what he sent me to do. And this is what he expects from me; that I collect all he sends me, always hold on to them, and raise them up to live forever."

### **The Jews Dispute Jesus' Claim (John 6:41-71)**

The priests scoffed at him for saying he was sent from Heaven, saying, "This is Joseph's son, Jesus. We know his parents. How can he be from Heaven?"

Don't murmur among yourselves," Jesus contended. "No one accepts me unless my Father brings him to me, and I will raise him up at the last day. Everyone who is receptive to God comes to me. Anyone who trusts me can have eternal life. I am the only one who has seen God. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but I'm not talking about physical provisions. I'm talking about something spiritual that a man can partake of and never die. I am living bread sent from Heaven, and if anyone ingests this bread, he will live forever. The bread I provide is my flesh, given to redeem humanity.

The priests argued about what he meant, telling them his flesh was their bread. Jesus explained, "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has spiritual life, and I will sustain his life when time has run its course. My body is meat for you, and my blood will truly quench your thirst. If you accept the life I offer, you will dwell in me and I in you. As the Father sent me and I live by him, so as you take me in, you will live by me. Unlike manna that sustains you physically until you die, if you eat this bread, you will live forever.

Many who followed him thought this was very confusing. "Does anybody understand what he's talking about?" They asked.

When Jesus noticed that his disciples were having trouble with it, he asked if it bothered them, too. "What's going to happen when you see me return to Heaven?" he asked. "Only the Holy Spirit gives eternal life. If you are only born physically, you won't receive this gift. I told you how

to get this true spiritual life, and some of you don't believe me. I know that. That's why I said no one can follow me unless the Father draws him.

Then some of his followers walked away and had no more to do with him. Jesus turned to his twelve disciples and asked, "What about you? Will you leave, too?" But Peter responded, "Who could we turn to, Lord? You speak with eternal wisdom. We know beyond a doubt you are the Christ, the son of the living God."

"Did I not handpick you?" Jesus replies. "And yet, one of you is the devil." He was speaking about Judas Iscariot, who would ultimately betray him.