

Jesus, the Chief Shepherd of the Church

Sermon by Pastor Diana J. Perkins

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This morning, I would like you to take a moment to think about this scenario. You have been given the task of training a group of 12 people to work with you on a mission that will determine the eternal destiny of the whole world. 3 1/2 years have been allotted to you for the training and then you will be taken from them and they will be left to carry out the mission of spreading the truths of the message to the whole world from the lessons that you have taught them. What kind of people would you choose? Where would you look to find the right people to work with for such a task? What if these people decided that the job was too much of a sacrifice and walked away from you? What if the call of the world was too much of a temptation for them to forsake all to follow you? When Jesus came to this world, Satan tried to snuff out his life within the first two years of his life. See Mathew 2:16. The wise men came from the east in search of the newborn king. The chief priests told Herod about prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah and Herod sent the wise men to find the baby and he asked them to come and tell him where the king was so he could go and worship him. Angels warned the wise men about Herod and they returned home a different route. They also told Joseph to take Jesus to Egypt until Herod was dead. When Herod realized he had been tricked, he went throughout Jerusalem and killed all baby boys under the age of 2 years. God protected his son.

Jesus began his ministry by choosing 12 followers. Some were ignorant fishermen, low esteemed tax collectors, and one would be a traitor. He didn't call any of the religious leaders of his day. None had educational degrees that would impress and gain respect of their fellow citizens. Jesus didn't get credentials from the chief priests, scribes or Pharisees. Jesus came from a poor family; Joseph his father was a carpenter. A minority of people understood through the revelation of God at the time of Jesus' birth that this was the Son of God, but the majority of the people didn't think much about this Galilean who one day called men to follow him. If you read Luke 2:40-52, you will learn that when Jesus was 12 years old, his parents took him to the feast of the Passover and the Scripture says that the child grew and waxed strong in spirit and filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon him. When the religious duties were fulfilled, his parents left for home, but Jesus tarried behind. They went a day's journey before they discovered that he was not with them and it took them three days to find him. He was sitting among the doctors both hearing them and asking questions of them. All that heard him was

astonished at his understanding and answers. When his mother saw him, she asked him why he would do such a thing. He asked them if they didn't understand that he must be about his father's business. They didn't understand what it meant, but his mother kept these things hidden away in her heart.

At age 30, Jesus was ready to choose his followers. John the Baptist had begun his ministry pointing to the fact that the Messiah would soon be revealed. In Matthew chapter 4:17, Jesus began to preach saying, "Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." As he was walking by the Sea of Galilee he saw two brothers Simon, called Peter, and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea for they were fishermen. He called to them saying "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." They immediately left their nets and followed him. From there he saw two other brothers James and John, sons of Zebedee in a ship with their father mending their nets and he called to them. They immediately left the ship and their father and followed him. How amazing is that? In Matthew 9:9 Jesus passed forth from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the receipt of customs and he said to him, "Follow me!" He arose and followed him. In John 1:43-45, you will find where Jesus chose Philip and Nathanael to follow him. The names of the twelve disciples are found in Matthew chapter 10:1-4. Judas was chosen to fulfill the Scriptures of a traitor.

As they journeyed with Jesus, other people believed in him and followed him. Mary Magdalene, a woman who was possessed with seven devils, was delivered of her affliction and followed Jesus. The outcast Samaritan woman left her water pots and ran into the city to proclaim that Jesus is the Christ once Jesus revealed his true identity to her. There were wealthy people who also believed in him, but many of them led obscure lives because they were afraid of the consequences from their peers if they proclaimed their belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

It was not an easy life following Jesus and proclaiming his truth. In John 6:30, there is a discussion between Jesus and some people who asked this question, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered them with these words, "This is the work of God that you believe in Him whom He sent." They replied that their ancestors ate manna in the desert and it is written, "He gave them bread from heaven to eat." Jesus responded by telling them that Moses didn't give them bread from heaven, but God provided that for them. Then He told them that they must believe that God sent Him to them as bread from heaven not to do his own will but to do the will of his Father who sent him. He said, "I am the bread of life." He

told them that those who his father had given to him would eat of his flesh and drink of his blood and have eternal life. This made them angry and they said that the saying was hard and they couldn't understand it so many stopped following Jesus after this conversation. Jesus turned to his 12 disciples and asked "Do you also want to go away?" Peter answered, "Lord, to whom would we go? You have the words to eternal life." Jesus was talking about a spiritual awakening and infilling of his spirit, but they didn't understand.

One of the men that Jesus chose was named Thomas. Thomas was one who dared to ask the tough questions. He was courageous and was not one who just followed the crowd., He spoke his mind and history has nicknamed him "doubting Thomas."

In John 14, Jesus spoke to his disciples about the fact that He was going back to the Father and He told them not to have troubled hearts, but to believe. He was going back to the Father in order to prepare a place that where He is there his children would be also. He promised to come back for them so they would all be together again at a future time. The disciples certainly didn't understand the words that Jesus spoke, but as in former times, most didn't ask any questions; they just listened. But Thomas said, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, and how can we know the way." Jesus spoke these wonderful words, "I am the way, I am the Truth and I am the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you know the Father."

In John 11, there is the wonderful story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. However, leading up to this event is the story of Jesus speaking to his disciples that He was going to the town of Bethany to "wake Lazarus up from his sleep." See verse 11.

The disciples tried to direct Jesus away from going to Bethany because people had threatened to kill him in that area. They argued that if Lazarus was sleeping, he would get better. Then Jesus told them that Lazarus was dead and He said, "Nevertheless, let us go to him."

Thomas, who was called a twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go that we may die with him," He is a symbol of strength as he spoke encouraging words to his fellowmen to follow Jesus even if it meant death to all of them. Thomas lost hope when Jesus was crucified. See John 20:24. He didn't stay close to

the disciples, but went off by himself. He missed the visitation of Jesus after he arose from the dead and when the disciples tried to tell him that Jesus had indeed risen from the dead, he refused to believe. He said that unless he saw the nail prints in His hands and could put his finger into His side, he would not believe.

Eight days later Thomas was with the disciples when Jesus came with the doors shut and He stood in their midst and said, "Peace to you." He then addressed Thomas. "Reach your finger here, and look at my hands; and reach your hand here and put it into my side. Do not be unbelieving, but believe." Thomas answered and said, "My Lord and My God!" Jesus said "Thomas because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Thomas was the first disciple to proclaim Jesus as Lord and God. Tradition records Thomas' travels as he proclaimed the gospel message of Jesus Christ. Modern Iraq, Iran, and India were places that he travelled to proclaim the gospel of Jesus. He built churches and won souls to Jesus in difficult parts of the world. When Portuguese people landed in India in the early 1600's they found groups of Christian believers settled there. The Mark Thomas Church was founded there many years before and the people were still proclaiming the truth of the gospel as Thomas had proclaimed it to their ancestors. Thomas was said to have been thrown into a pit by a Brahmin and pierced with a spear causing his death. Thomas asked hard questions and Jesus answered them. His word says, "Come let us reason together" says the Lord.

Matthew 16:24 says if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Have you heard the call of Jesus "Follow me?" If you have heard the message of salvation and been told that Jesus is the way to eternal life, what has been your response?

There are stories in the Bible of those who were among those who heard the gospel but rejected it. There were people who walked with Jesus that were not faithful followers. There were mockers, doubters, blasphemers and then there were those who heard his words and wondered and marveled at him for he spoke as one having authority not like the religious leaders of their day. Mark 1:22.

There were those who sought after Jesus for many reasons. Some followed him to witness miracles, receive miracles or to be fed from his hands. Luke 9:14.

Others followed him so they could accuse him and mock him. Others sat at his feet to learn about eternal life. In Luke 10:40 Mary sat listening to Jesus while her sister prepared a meal. Martha asked Jesus to send Mary out to help her, but he told her that she was concerned about many things but Mary had chosen the better part and it would not be taken away from her.

Jesus asked his disciples this question "Who do men say that I am?" They answered, "Some say you are John the Baptist and some say Elias, and other say that one of the old prophets is raised again." He said to them "But who say you that I am?" Peter answered "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus told him that he was blessed because man didn't reveal his identity to Peter, but his Father which is in heaven. He told him that his church would be built on this truth.

Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you declare that he was born of a virgin, lived and ministered on earth until he was crucified and buried in a rich man's tomb and arose on the third day? He ascended into heaven to prepare a place for his children and will one day come back for his church. Are you looking and waiting for the coming of the Lord? I pray that you will heed the call "Follow Me" and repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ and be filled with the spirit of God that you might be found worthy to live forever in the kingdom of God.