



## PART 12 – JESUS' MISSION

- What was Jesus' mission? Why did He say He had come?
- What did Jesus expect of and promise to His followers?

### Jesus' call to discipleship

Jesus' ministry began around AD 29 with His baptism by John and lasted for around three and a half years until His death in AD 33. Each year, like all faithful Jewish men who were able, Jesus travelled from Galilee to Jerusalem for the Passover and the Gospel accounts are often structured around these journeys. The three years of Jesus' public ministry were marked by different responses from the people:

#### *Year 1: Beginnings – a call to find rest*

Jesus' ministry opened with a dramatic statement: "The Kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). He began to perform miracles and, following a familiar pattern of teachers having followers who learned from their example and teachings, called people to become His disciples. **Matthew 11:27-30** records Jesus' words during this time. He boldly claimed a unique relationship with God as Father and a unique ability to reveal God to other people, then called weary people to come to Him and find the rest they needed. Jesus recognised that many people are weary and heavily burdened by anxiety, guilt and shame. Ultimately, these burdens result from slavery to sin. To such people Jesus promises rest, but this rest comes through becoming His disciple because only He can bring us to His Father. If we want Him to free us, we must take His yoke. A yoke is a bar holding two animals together to pull a plough and in the Old Testament it is a picture of a king's rule. The people were yoked to their king. Jesus was saying that His rest only comes through submission to His rule over our lives. **To know His help and strength we must accept Him as Lord.**

#### *Year 2: Popularity – a challenge to take up the cross*

Jesus became very popular. Thousands of people followed Him wherever He went. Many came from His home region of Galilee, but others came from Judea and He even gathered some followers from the region of Samaria, which Jews normally avoided but He visited. During this period, Jesus spent a great deal of time privately with His twelve chosen disciples. The key turning point in His ministry is recorded in **Matthew 16:13-28**, when Jesus asked them who people said He was. Simon Peter responded that He was "the Messiah, the Son of the living God" and Jesus commended him, saying this truth had been revealed by God and promising to build His Church on this foundation (see Part 21). After this recognition by the disciples of who Jesus is, He began to speak about His coming death (v21). Remarkably, Simon Peter who had made a great declaration of faith was rebuked by Jesus for His response to this foretelling of His death. Peter said that Jesus should never suffer in this way, but Jesus said He was speaking human ideas inspired by Satan, not God's perspective. The disciples had grasped who Jesus is (His **IDENTITY**), but they had not yet understood what He had come to do (His **MISSION**). They knew He was the Messiah but could not see what kind of Messiah He would be.

Jesus now began to challenge people who wanted to follow Him to count the cost. He told them they must take up their cross to follow Him, meaning they must die to their own desires to follow His will. He warned that we do not have the power to preserve our own lives and if we pursue the world's riches, we may lose our souls. Only Jesus can guard our souls and give us eternal acceptance with His Father. He spoke of a future day when He would come in glory to judge and explained that the outcome of that judgement depends on how people respond to Him now (He uses the title 'Son of Man' to describe Himself, echoing words from Daniel's vision of God's coming king – Daniel 7:13-14). What would you give in exchange for your soul? What matters more than knowing that you have eternal life? **To have real life we must surrender everything to Jesus.**

#### *Year 3: Rejection – a warning not to be left outside*

During this third year, opposition to Jesus grew. Many who had followed Him now abandoned Him because He did not do what they expected the Messiah to do, because they did not understand some of His teaching or because they were not willing to count the cost of discipleship. Jesus continued to predict His death and resurrection and His parables increasingly warned about future judgement and the risk of being left out of God's kingdom. When in to Jerusalem for Passover this year, He was arrested and executed (see Part 15).

## Jesus chooses twelve apostles (Luke 6:12-16)

From His many disciples, Jesus chose twelve to become His 'apostles', meaning authorised representatives. The number twelve is significant, echoing the twelve tribes and indicating that Jesus was forming a renewed Israel – a new people of God – around Himself. These men, none of them highly educated or powerful, illustrate the kind of people Jesus loved and accepted and the subversive nature of His mission:

1. **Simon Peter** – Simon son of Jonah, a fisherman from Bethsaida in Galilee, was renamed 'Peter' by Jesus. He was often spokesman for the twelve, wrote 1 and 2 Peter, and Mark's Gospel draws on his memories.
2. **Andrew** – Peter's brother and also a fisherman, Andrew is best remembered for bringing people to Jesus, including his brother. John 1:35-42 tells how Jesus called Andrew.
3. **James** – son of Zebedee and a fisherman working alongside Peter. Luke 5:10 and Matthew 4:21-22 tell how Jesus called James and his brother John. He nicknamed them Boanerges ('sons of thunder').
4. **John** – wrote five New Testament books: John's Gospel, 1, 2 and 3 John and Revelation. One of the youngest of the disciples and especially close to Jesus, he referred to himself as the disciple Jesus loved.
5. **Philip** – another man from Peter's home town of Bethsaida. John 1:43-51 tells how Jesus called him.
6. **Bartholomew** (possibly the same person who is called Nathanael in John 1:45ff. and John 21:2).
7. **Matthew** (also called Levi son of Alphaeus) – a tax collector, a much-hated profession. Luke 5:27-32 and Matthew 9:9-13 tell us about his calling. Believed to have written Matthew's Gospel.
8. **Thomas** – nicknamed Didymus, meaning 'twin'. Thomas is best known for doubting that Jesus had been raised from the dead until he saw Him (John 20:26-29).
9. **James son of Alphaeus** (possibly a brother of Matthew and called James the younger in Mark 15:40).
10. **Simon the Zealot** – the Zealots were a radical Jewish group who strongly opposed Roman rule.
11. **Judas of James** (either a brother or son of a man named James; probably also known as Thaddeaus).
12. **Judas Iscariot** – this disciple, always placed last in lists of the twelve, betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Responsible for looking after the money bag, used to steal from it (John 12:4-6).

## Jesus' mission – why did He come?

John's Gospel records five statements of Jesus about why He came into the world. Four are about His mission to make God's truth known: to do God's will (6:38); to bring truth (18:37); to shine like a light in the darkness (12:46); to separate those who acknowledge God's truth from those who are spiritually blind (9:39). In the fifth, He promises "life in all its fullness" (10:10) to all who believe in Him. **John 3** helps us understand the nature of this life. Nicodemus, a respected Jewish teacher, came to Jesus at night because he recognised that someone who did such miracles must be from God. The mention of this visit being at night indicates the darkness in Nicodemus' mind about who God really is, into which Jesus will shine light. Nicodemus would have been hoping for the Messiah to establish God's kingdom on earth. Jesus said inclusion in God's Kingdom is possible now, but requires a second birth from the Holy Spirit (v5-6). The life that results from being "born again", which is the life of God's kingdom, is eternal – it is both complete and it lasts forever.

Jesus explained that this eternal life under God's rule is possible because He came down from Heaven (v13), but that He must be lifted up in the same way Moses lifted up a snake in the desert (v14). This refers to a time when God judged the unfaithful Israelites through a plague but provided healing for all who looked at a bronze snake on a pole held by Moses (Numbers 21:4-9). Jesus was referring to His lifting up on the cross, which would bring healing for a greater problem: sins. As the Israelites had to look at the snake and trust God to heal them, people must look to Jesus and trust in Him to save them. John comments further (v16-21), explaining that people are condemned before God because of their sins. They must come into the light, allowing their sins to be exposed, and trust in God's Son who did not come to condemn us, but to bring us salvation. We can either ignore Him or come to Him. John's summary of Jesus' mission in verse 16 is probably the most famous verse in the Bible and summarises its message: "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life."

### **SUMMARY: Jesus called people to follow Him and to believe in Him to receive eternal life**

- Eternal life comes through forgiveness of sins through Jesus' death and new birth by the Holy Spirit.
- Being a Christian means living under God's rule (kingdom) as a disciple (follower) of Jesus, our Lord.