

The background of the entire page is a photograph. It shows a dark, possibly black, ceramic mug with a handle on the right side. In front of the mug, an open Bible lies flat on a wooden surface, which appears to be a table or desk. The pages of the Bible are open to a text-heavy page, with some text visible. The lighting is warm and soft, coming from the upper left, creating a gentle glow on the mug and the Bible. The overall tone is peaceful and contemplative.

Guided Bible Study

# The Twelve Disciples

(Week 4)

Luke 9 v. 51-56 | Acts 12 v. 1-2

An adapted version of Life Builder Study | Douglas Connelly

# Welcome

For the purposes of our Bible Studies, we will be using Life Builder Study Series (Inter-Varsity Press). Our theme for these studies is: The Twelve Disciples. The studies were originally written by Douglas Connelly, but we will be modifying them in order that they become more usable for home study as we seek to transition between the church building and our homes during the next several weeks.

These studies give us the opportunity to study the Bible in a greater depth and to reflect on what it is saying to us. If you will be doing the studies at home, it is suggested that you do the study on Wednesday morning, for an hour, starting at 10.30 am. Get yourself a tea or coffee, a Bible pen and paper (for any notes you want to make) and begin studying.

Hope that you enjoy it!

**Pastor Ian**

# Context

Jesus had about three years to mould a dozen fearful and faithless men into the pillars of a worldwide movement. Despite this brief window, time spent with Jesus had a transforming effect on each of them; most would be inspired and emboldened to proclaim him as the saviour against great opposition. Through these ten studies, we too can experience the deep change that only time in Jesus' presence can bring.

# Some Thoughts To Help You While You Study

The purpose of the study is to learn to be zealous for the Lord without walking over other people or calling down fire from heaven.

James was probably the older of the two sons of Zebedee since his name is always given first when referring to both brothers. In two of the New Testament lists of the Apostles, James's name comes immediately after Peter's name. This placement implies that James was a strong leader in the Christian fellowship. He was also one of the three disciples who made up the inner circles of Jesus' apostles – Peter, James and his brother John.

In this study, the event takes place at the beginning of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. He had resolutely set his heart and mind towards that city and the final events of his ministry that were to unfold there. This rejection by the Samaritans is just a foreshadowing of the conflict Jesus will face in the coming days.

The Jews of Jesus' day looked at Samaritans with contempt. In the Jews' minds, the Samaritans were a mixed – race people who held to a corrupted view of God's law and were unworthy of heaven. The Samaritans in turn despised the Jews for their arrogance and condemnation. Jesus, however, had shown nothing but love and acceptance towards Samaritans.

The threat to call down fire from heaven had a biblical back – drop. In

this same region of Old Testament Israel, the prophet Elijah called down fire to destroy his enemies (2 Kings 1). James and John must have thought they were on pretty solid biblical ground with their suggestion. Jesus' mission was very different from Elijah's. Jesus came to save, not destroy.

Jesus' rebuke to James and John probably centred on their own motives in their suggestion. James and John didn't have the power to bring fire from heaven, only Jesus did. Jesus undoubtedly also rebuked them for their lack of compassion for the people of the village. The people were insulting, but they were also people Jesus came to reach with his grace.

Jesus wanted James to see that the best approach to personal insult is to absorb the pain and move to a more open situation. Arguing with or condemning people rarely leads them to Christ. If they refuse the message, move on to those who are more open to hearing it.

Rebuke has to be used with great care. Rebuke in itself can crush a person's spirit or send him or her away feeling worthless or condemned. Jesus seems to have rebuked James and John in front of the whole group. Maybe there were other disciples who needed to learn from Jesus' rebuke of these hot – headed brothers.

In his wise and loving plan, God allowed one disciple to live (Peter) and another to die (James). Apart from Judas Iscariot's suicide, this is the only death of an apostle recorded in Scripture. The approximate date of James's execution is A.D. 44.

# Study 4 - James

## (Hating Our Enemies)

Nicknames can be fun or cruel. The writer of the studies that we are looking at said: 'My younger brother and I called our older brother 'Fungus' – but usually not to his face'. Jesus gave two of his disciples a nickname. He called James and John 'sons of thunder' – a reflection of their passionate, zealous, sometimes stormy personalities.

PERSONAL REFLECTION: Have you ever had a nickname? Did it accurately reflect anything about you? Think back to the names you were called in your younger years. Were they expressions of love or hurtful arrows? What memories do those names recall?

Even though James was one of the three disciples in Jesus' inner circle, he is one of the least familiar of the Twelve. James never appears alone in the Gospels. He is always linked with his better – known brother, John. We get a glimpse of why James was a 'son of thunder' in this account of a journey Jesus and his men took through Samaria. Jesus sent some men ahead to find lodging in a Samaritan village. Read Luke 9 v. 51 – 56

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

Where was Jesus going and what significant events were on the horizon of his life?

The Jews and the Samaritans were cultural enemies in Jesus' day, but Jesus had never shown anything but good will toward Samaritans. Describe the Samaritans' response to Jesus and his men. How do you

handle it when someone rejects you because of personal prejudice or for some other petty reason?

What does the suggestion from James and John tell you about their normal approach to obstacles or obstinate people? What kind of spiritual leaders would they have been at this point?

What do you think Jesus rebuked them for? Their zeal? Their attitude? Their own prejudices?

What was Jesus trying to cultivate in James by his rebuke and his response of moving on to another village?

What attitude or quick reaction in you might Jesus single out for rebuke? What would Jesus say to you?

In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson translates rebuke as 'exposing our rebellion' (2 Timothy 3 v. 16). What is the value of exposing rebellion in the lives of those you may seek to disciple to be followers of Jesus? What are some guidelines for the use of rebuke?

Now go on and read Acts 12 v. 1 – 2. James was the first apostle to be killed for his faith. Herod Agrippa 1 arrested both James and Peter (Acts 12 v. 3), but Peter was miraculously delivered from Herod's prison. How would you explain to other Christians why God spared Peter but not James?

In what ways do you want to be like James? What aspects of James' early character do you want to avoid or correct in your life?

Commit any prejudice or short – tempered reactions to the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you have self – control over anger or judgment towards others.



# Now or Later

Eusebius, an early church historian, passes on this account of James's death:

[The man] who led James to the judgment – seat [for trial], when he saw him bearing his testimony, was moved and confessed that he himself was also a Christian. They were both therefore led away together; and on the way he begged James to forgive him. And [James] after considering a little, said: 'Peace be with thee', and kissed him. And thus they were both beheaded at the same time.

What response would the 'old' James have made to this request for forgiveness?

## *Acts 12:1-4*

- 1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church.
- 2 Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.
- 3 And because he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to seize Peter also. Now it was during the Days of Unleavened Bread.
- 4 So when he had arrested him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four squads of soldiers to keep him, intending to bring him before the people after Passover.