

Matt Henry
Mark 10:35-45
25 March 2018

“King James”

Grace and peace...

[NOTE: It’s easy to get names mixed up, but this is not the other disciple, James the Lesser, the son of Alphaeus. This is not the James who wrote the book of James, the half-brother of Jesus.]

Of the Inner Trio—Peter, James and John—James is the least familiar to us.

But we do know something about his parents. His father, Zebedee, was a powerful guy. He had influence and a big fishing business. And Salome, the mother of James, likely helped provide financial support for the meals and gas money needed for Jesus’ ministry. Salome will show up as one of the women at the tomb on Easter morning. She loved her sons, James and John. They were always acting together. The only time James is mentioned individually is his martyrdom in the book of Acts.

Jesus gave the brothers James and John a nickname. He called them Sons of Thunder which tells us something about their personality—intense, zealous, passionate, ambitious. Boom! James is not a get-along kind of guy. He is not a compromiser. He didn’t keep a check on that zeal and emotion and at times, it got him into trouble. For example:

One day Jesus and his disciples were traveling through Samaria on His way to Jerusalem. That in and of itself is a big deal because most Jews would never

travel through unclean Samaria. They would go out of their way into the desolate region of the Perea desert, cross the Jordan River twice just to avoid Samaria. The Samaritans and Jews hated each other. They had competing worship systems. Even though Jesus had made champions out of Samaritans (think: the woman at the well, the leper he healed who was thankful and came back, the parable of the Good Samaritan). Yet since the Samaritans know Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, they don't want to offer any accommodations. Very inhospitable, very rude. James and John see this rejection and they're outraged and offended and ask Jesus in Luke 9:54, "Lord do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" That's the Sons of Thunder asking for the equivalent of lightning. They wanted lightning to strike twice in a way because fire from heaven, coming down in Samaria, has precedent in the Bible.

When King Ahaziah wanted to kill the prophet Elijah, he sent fifty soldiers to do the job. And Elijah called down fire on them—they were incinerated. King Ahaziah sends another 50 fifty men—Elijah calls for more fire—they're toast. Incredibly, the king sends another 50 men. But this time the captain pleads for their lives, Elijah spares them and goes with the soldiers to deliver the news in person that King Ahaziah is going to die and he does. So, for James and John to

recall this story of Elijah's triumph, they're just going back to a Sunday School (or Saturday School?) classic and saying, "Lord, isn't it time for a little fireworks display? Elijah did it. We can do the same. Just say the word!"

But Jesus turned and rebuked them. They needed correcting because they didn't get the essence of Jesus' ministry. He didn't come to condemn and destroy. He came to save. The point is vengeance is the Lord's. He'll repay. He'll judge. Fire will fall from heaven eventually when the earth is destroyed. But for now, the mission of God is one of mercy. James and John aren't acquainted with grace as they should be. Why not? They got so worked about making things right that they forgot to love their enemy.

I feel we can relate to that—we want to fix the injustice and make it right on whatever issue it is, that we forget to love the person. When love is not our motivation, that deserves a swift rebuke from Jesus. So He turns and rebukes them and they go on to another village. That's the solution in this instance: to be rejected and allow that rejection to stand. Followers of Jesus have to be able to accept rejection when it occurs because Jesus accepted rejection.

James and John make another outrageous request. Their approach is interesting, "Teacher, we want you to do whatever we ask." Well, what kind of prelude is that? Jesus doesn't agree to their stipulations, but asks, "Oh yeah, and

what's that?" "Grant that we would sit, one at your right and one at your left in your glory." Those are obvious places of honor. This tells us that James and John are theologians of glory and power. They are thinking exaltation. But Jesus is thinking suffering. He is thinking about the kingdom of grace which entails the cross. Jesus said, "You don't know what you're asking. Can you drink from the cup that I drink and be baptized with the baptism I will undergo?" "We are able."

Think how that sounded...don't make it so churchy that you miss the sense of what they heard. Jesus said cup and baptism. They heard drinks and a warm bath. That is the life of luxury! That's a king's life! "Yeah, we can handle that!" But what Jesus meant, as we know, is to drink from Father's cup of woe. To be baptized in this sense was to undergo a baptism in the blood of suffering. James and John were seeking the kingdom of glory, when Jesus was working in the kingdom of grace.

Jesus says, "You will drink the cup and you will be baptized..." and this is a reference to their martyrdom. "But to sit my right hand or my left is not mine to grant; it is for those for whom it has been prepared." Interesting limitation on the Son's part! It's apparently the Father's call. I wonder if James and John understood this part more clearly because like Jesus, they were sons of a powerful father too.

I can't tell you who will be at Jesus' right and left in the kingdom of glory. But I can tell you who was Jesus' right and left in the kingdom of grace. Two thieves occupied that place at their crucifixion! This was the opposite place of honor, but it was the place in which one of them put his faith in Jesus as Savior and was promised a place in paradise.

James and John didn't know what they were asking. Neither do we at times. But that's OK because Jesus always answers better than we ask. We usually pray or think along the lines of glory. We ask God to fix it all, heal it all or that we avoid all suffering. But our God is acquainted with suffering. He is the Man of Sorrows. He doesn't lead us around suffering, but through suffering. It's how He wants to be known. So we don't let ourselves become theologians of glory by promising things we can't promise: "It'll be OK. Everything's going to work out." Well, it may or it may not! But either way, we need and we have a God is still with us and for us. He's not just God of the good times.

Now when the other ten disciples got word of James and John's request, they were so upset *but only because they didn't think of it first!* They squabble about who's the greatest. But Jesus teaches them what greatness looks like by becoming a servant of all. For all of the disciples, Jesus has to demonstrate what being the king of grace looks like and that means the cross. "For even the Son of

Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (v. 45).

Yet for all their arguing and angling, James never did place first—except in one category. He was the first apostle to be martyred. His death by the sword (beheading) is the only death of the apostles that is listed in Scripture.

James made a lot of enemies in that bold personality of his and he found himself in opposition to Herod. This is Herod Agrippa I, the nephew of the Herod that tried to kill the baby Jesus. When Herod decided to act and try to stop the church’s progress, he knew it was James that had to die. The Lord was using James to do great things.

Acts 12:1-3, “About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed the James, the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also.” (Don’t worry, an angel springs him out!)

Eusebius, the early church historian, passes on an account of James’ death that came from Clement of Alexandria. “[Clement] says that the one who led James to the judgment seat when he saw him bearing his testimony, was moved, and confessed that he was himself also a Christian. They were both, therefore, he says 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" (MacArthur, 93). See how far James had come—from wanting to call down fire on those who rejected Jesus, to giving the kiss of peace, even in the moment of final rejection, and the laying down of his life.

The lessons I see Jesus teaching us through James are these:

- 1) Let go of anger and choose to love.
- 2) Stop seeking glory for yourself and choose to serve others.
- 3) Be quick to forgive and choose to be at peace.

These are not timid things, but require a boldness in personality and example that could only come from Jesus the King. Some of us are emotional people, but James is proof that when we submit our passions and emotions to God, He refines us—and reigns over us—so we can become more like Him.

In Jesus' name, Amen.