

## James, A Son of Thunder

St. Mark Lutheran  
Three services

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Today we conclude our six disciple series based on some of Rev. Richard Pfeil's messages in "Walking with Those Who Walked with Jesus". I have one more "Quickie Quiz" in store for you. Some people prefer the true-false questions. Some people prefer the fill in questions. In an impossible attempt to please everyone, I have included three of each. Here we go.

The first question concerns a brother. James had a brother who was also one of "The Twelve". What was his name? ANSWER: His name was John. That earned you five points. You better mark it down. Here is question number two. True or false, James was the first of the disciples to be killed. ANSWER: If you answered "true", you just earned ten points. Here is question number three. What was James' father's name? ANSWER: His father's name was Zebedee. If you knew that, your count just went up fifteen points. Here is a true or false question for number four. The Apostle James was also the author of the Book of James located in the New Testament. ANSWER: If you answered "false", you get twenty points. It is generally believed that the Book of James was written by the James who was the brother of Jesus. Here is question five, our last true-false question. There are indications that James probably struggled with his temper. ANSWER: If you answered "true", your score has increased by twenty-five points. Here is question number six. You will really have to be sharp to get your thirty points for question six. James was one of the "inner circle" of three apostles who were the only ones to witness three events. The first was the raising of Jarius' daughter. The second was agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. What was the third one? I'll even give you a hint. The key word starts with a "t". ANSWER: You finish in a blaze of glory with thirty points if you remembered the word "transfiguration". James, John, and Peter were the only three to witness the transfiguration of Jesus up on the mountain.

Let me ask you this. What kind of people does God pick to serve him? He picks all kinds of people. He has picked some people down through history that might really surprise you. But we should not be surprised because God can do anything, and he often changes for the better those that he has called into ministry.

Many believe that was the case with the Apostle James. It appears he may have been a little rough around the edges. It is likely that he struggled with his temper. Jesus himself gave him and his brother the nickname of "Sons of Thunder".

One particular incident recorded in the Holy Scriptures really stands out. We referred to this in an earlier message, but we will take a fresh look at it now. Luke 9:51-56 tells us, "As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. And he sent messengers up ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, 'Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?' But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and they went to another village."

There was bad blood between the Samaritans and the Jews. If the Samaritans knew that you were heading toward Jerusalem, they did not let you have accommodations there. There were reports that they sometimes even secretly killed Jews for passing through their territory. Jesus decided to go through there anyway. He sent messengers ahead into a Samaritan village to get things ready. But the messengers had a bad experience. They were not welcome because the people heard that they were headed for Jerusalem.

When James and John saw this, they had their own solution. That's when they asked Jesus, "Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to destroy them?"

James doesn't seem much like a loving person here. He doesn't seem to have any compassion. Of course, he has plenty of reasons to not like the Samaritans. The Jews believed the Samaritans worshipped in the wrong place. They twisted the Scriptures. They were too liberal in their interpretation. They were often open to intermarriage with non believers, and tended to get involved with idolatry. James favored a quick and effective solution. "Boom!" and they would be gone.

There will come a day when the non believers will be gone. But this was not the day. Jesus was on a mission to save people, not to destroy or punish them. Remember the time he met the Samaritan woman at the well? She believed in him, and she went and got some more of her people and many of them came to believe in him also. As Jesus once told Nicodemus, "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:17) That was Jesus' mission; he made that the disciples' mission; and that is our mission today also.

What else do we see in James? Well, this may surprise you. His greatest weakness is also his greatest strength. He has a passion for God. He has a passion for Jesus. Yes, he can be harsh and critical, and it appears that he has a bit of a temper. But if he does not push it too far, it can actually be a strength. Jesus saw that. That's why he names him Boanerges, Son of Thunder, in the first place. He is a son of thunder. He has a passion for God. Note that our Lord didn't send him back home or dismiss him as a disciple. He corrected him, but let him go on serving the Lord at another village.

When you think of James, do you think of a poor, humble fisherman? If so, your image of him is probably wrong. If you read all the passages about him, he seemed to be from a successful family-owned business of at least two generations. There were hired men who worked in the business which would certainly indicate it was doing well. He had a partnership with Peter and Andrew who were rich enough to own homes, one in Bethsaida and another in Capernaum. They owned dragnets for their fishing business, not just throw nets, as used by the poor fishermen. There is every indication the Zebedee business was doing well and offered a lot of perks and rewards in the future.

So it is believed that James was part of a wealthy, successful family business, and he gave it all up. He gave up owning his own life. He gave up being self-employed and having an easier life in his later years. He gave up his financial security. He ultimately gave up his life. What did he give it up for? He gave it up because of his relationship with Jesus. He gave it up because he realized who Jesus really was, the Son of God, who died to pay for our sins. He gave it up because he believed there was a greater reward coming in the kingdom of God. Let me ask you something. Is your relationship with the Lord so solid, so intense, that you are willing to give up anything for Jesus?

Was James a perfect man? No, he was probably not even close to being a perfect man. But he was changed for the better as he walked with Jesus. It is in the journey with our Lord Jesus, that we as believers learn how to walk, talk, and act as Christians. He had his flaws, as we all have our flaws. But God did something for James that he desires to do for us. He used James and his passion for good in his kingdom work, and he worked to turn him away from legalism, hatred, and harshness to grace, compassion, and love.

You know, as a culture most of us have a passion for something. But maybe we have a passion for the wrong things at times. We have a passion for sports. We gather in huge arenas to watch our favorite teams, and if we can't do that we often watch them on television. We go nuts when our team does well or achieves something great. Most of the games are three-four hours long, and if the game goes into overtime, we don't care because we are having such an exciting time. Wouldn't it be great if all four hundred seventy-five or so people at St. Mark had a passion for God like that? Wouldn't it be great if we had a passion to spend time with Jesus, to do things for Jesus, to often worship Jesus? Can you imagine the effect on us, those close to us, and those around us if we all had a passion for Jesus? God help us, that it might be so. Amen.