



Applied Faith Men's Bible Study

South Hills Baptist Church

7350 Granbury Rd.

Fort Worth, TX 76123

## The Apostles, John and James

### Sons of Thunder

### Lesson #4

Lesson #32 (overall)

#### John the Apostle

The Apostle John is the author of five New Testament books: the gospel of John, the three short epistles that also bear his name (1, 2, and 3 John) and the book of Revelation. John was part of Jesus' "inner circle" and, along with Peter and James, John was given the privilege of witnessing Jesus' conversation with Moses and Elijah on the mount of the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-9). His importance in the twelve grew as he matured, and after the crucifixion, he became a "pillar" in the Jerusalem church (Galatians 2:9), ministered with Peter (Acts 3:1, 4:13, 8:14), and finally was exiled to the island of Patmos by the

Romans, where he received from God the majestic visions that comprise the book of Revelation.

Not to be confused with John the Baptist, the Apostle John is the brother of James, another of the twelve disciples of Jesus. Together, they were called by Jesus “Boanerges,” which means “sons of thunder,” and therein we find a key to John’s personality. Both brothers were characterized by zeal, passion and ambition. In his early days with Jesus, at times John acted rashly, recklessly, impetuously, and aggressively. We see him in Mark 9 forbidding a man to cast out demons in Jesus’ name because he was not part of the twelve (Mark 9:38-41). Jesus gently rebuked him, saying no one could cast out demons in Jesus’ name and then turn around and speak evil of Him. In Luke 9:51-54, we see the brothers wanting to call down fire from heaven to destroy the Samaritans who refused to welcome Jesus. Again, Jesus had to rebuke them for their intolerance and lack of genuine love for the lost. John’s zeal for Jesus was also influenced by his natural ambition, as seen in his request (through his mother) that he and his brother be seated on Jesus’ right and left hands in the kingdom, an incident that caused a temporary rift between the brothers and the other disciples (Matthew 20:20-24).

In spite of these youthful expressions of misdirected passion, John aged well. He began to understand the need for humility in those who desired to be great. John’s is the only gospel that records Jesus washing the disciples’ feet (John 13:4-16). Jesus’ simple act of servanthood must have impacted John greatly. By the time of the crucifixion, Jesus had enough confidence in the young man to turn the care of His mother over to him, a charge John took very seriously. From that day on, John cared for her as if she were his own mother (John 19:25-27). John’s rash request for special honor in the kingdom had given way to a compassion and humility that would characterize his ministry in his

later life. Although he remained courageous and bold, his ambition was balanced by the humility he learned at Jesus' feet. This willingness to serve others and suffer for the sake of the gospel must have enabled him to bear his final imprisonment on Patmos where, according to reliable historical sources, he lived in a cave, cut off from those he loved, and was treated with cruelty and reproach. In the opening of the book of Revelation, which he received from the Holy Spirit during this time, he referred to himself as 'your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus' (Revelation 1:9). He had learned to look beyond his earthly sufferings to the heavenly glory that awaits all who patiently endure.

John was passionately devoted to the proclamation of truth. No one in Scripture, except the Lord Jesus, had more to say about the concept of truth. His joy was proclaiming the truth to others and then watching them walk in it (3 John 4). His strongest condemnation was for those who perverted the truth and led others astray, especially if they claimed to be believers (1 John 2:4). His passion for truth fueled his concern for the sheep who might be deceived by false teachers, and his warnings about them take up much of 1 John. He had no qualms about identifying as "false prophets" and "antichrists" those who tried to pervert the truth, even proclaiming them to be demonic in nature (1 John 2:18, 26, 3:7, 4:1-7).

At the same time, John is also called the "apostle of love." In his own gospel, he refers to himself as "the one whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20). He is depicted as the one leaning against Jesus' breast at the last supper. His brief second epistle is filled with expressions of his deep love for those in his care. He addresses his first epistle to a group of believers "whom I love in the truth" and exhorts them to "love one another" by walking in obedience to Jesus' commands (1 John 1:1, 5-6).

John's life serves to remind us of several lessons which we can apply to our own lives. First, zeal for the truth must always be balanced by a love for people. Without it, zeal can turn to harshness and judgmentalism. Conversely, abundant love that lacks the ability to discern truth from error can become gushing sentimentality. As John learned as he matured, if we speak the truth in love, we, and those we touch, will "in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

Second, confidence and boldness, untempered by compassion and grace, can quickly turn to pride and smugness. Confidence is a wonderful virtue, but without humility, it can become self-confidence, which can lead to boasting and an attitude of exclusiveness. When that happens, our witness of the grace of God is tainted, and others see in us exactly the kind of person they wish not to be. Like John, if we are to be effective witnesses for Christ, our demeanor should be one that reflects a passion for the truth, compassion for people, and a steadfast desire to serve and represent our Lord by reflecting His humility and grace.

### **James**

James, the older of the two apostle sons of Zebedee, whom Jesus nicknamed "sons of thunder," was thirty years old when he became an apostle. He was married, had four children, and lived near his parents in the outskirts of Capernaum, Bethsaida. He was a fisherman, plying his calling in company with his younger brother John and in association with Andrew and Simon. James and his brother John enjoyed the advantage of having known Jesus longer than any of the other apostles.

This able apostle was a temperamental contradiction; he seemed really to possess two natures, both of which were actuated by strong feelings. He was particularly vehement when his indignation was once fully aroused. He had a fiery temper when once it was adequately provoked, and when the storm was over, he was always wont to justify and excuse his anger under the pretense that it was wholly a manifestation of righteous indignation. Except for these periodic upheavals of wrath, James's personality was much like that of Andrew. He did not have Andrew's discretion or insight into human nature, but he was a much better public speaker. Next to Peter, unless it was Matthew, James was the best public orator among the twelve.

Though James was in no sense moody, he could be quiet and taciturn one day and a very good talker and storyteller the next. He usually talked freely with Jesus, but among the twelve, for days at a time he was the silent man. His one great weakness was these spells of unaccountable silence.

The outstanding feature of James's personality was his ability to see all sides of a proposition. Of all the twelve, he came the nearest to grasping the real import and significance of Jesus' teaching. He, too, was slow at first to comprehend the Master's meaning, but when they had finished their training, he had acquired a superior concept of Jesus' message. James was able to understand a wide range of human nature; he got along well with the versatile Andrew, the impetuous Peter, and his self-contained brother John.

Though James and John had their troubles trying to work together, it was inspiring to observe how well they got along. They did not succeed quite so well as Andrew and Peter, but they did much better than would ordinarily be expected of two brothers, especially such headstrong and determined brothers. But, strange as it may seem,

these two sons of Zebedee were much more tolerant of each other than they were of strangers. They had great affection for one another; they had always been happy playmates. It was these "sons of thunder" who wanted to call fire down from heaven to destroy the Samaritans who presumed to show disrespect for their Master. But the untimely death of James greatly modified the vehement temperament of his younger brother John.

That characteristic of Jesus which James most admired was the Master's sympathetic affection. Jesus' understanding interest in the small and the great, the rich and the poor, made a great appeal to him.

James Zebedee was a well-balanced thinker and planner. Along with Andrew, he was one of the more level-headed of the apostolic group. He was a vigorous individual but was never in a hurry. He was an excellent balance wheel for Peter.

He was modest and undramatic, a daily server, an unpretentious worker, seeking no special reward when he once grasped something of the real meaning of the kingdom. And even in the story about the mother of James and John, who asked that her sons be granted places on the right hand and the left hand of Jesus, it should be remembered that it was the mother who made this request. And when they signified that they were ready to assume such responsibilities, it should be recognized that they were cognizant of the dangers accompanying the Master's supposed revolt against the Roman power, and that they were also willing to pay the price. When Jesus asked if they were ready to drink the cup, they replied that they were. And as concerns James, it was literally true—he did drink the cup with the Master, seeing that he was the first of the apostles to experience martyrdom, being early put to death with the sword by Herod Agrippa. James was thus the first of the twelve to sacrifice his life upon the new battle line of the kingdom.

Herod Agrippa feared James above all the other apostles. He was indeed often quiet and silent, but he was brave and determined when his convictions were aroused and challenged.

James lived his life to the full, and when the end came, he bore himself with such grace and fortitude that even his accuser and informer, who attended his trial and execution, was so touched that he rushed away from the scene of James's death to join himself to the disciples of Jesus.

### Application/Activity

The common trait that we see in these two brothers, both in Christ and biologically, is their passion and a willingness to serve others. They learned that to be great in God's Kingdom, they must be the least among man and serve all others. Let that be our prayer that God will show us how we can truly serve others and that we would be obedient to that call. Be advised, when you receive that call, it will not be serving in a way that you may be thinking. Be ready to heed God's call in whatever way He deems best!

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