

JAMES THE STRONG, STEADY, SILENT MAN

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And going on from thence, he saw other two bretheren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them (Matt. 4:21).

And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said. Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? (Luke 9:54).

And he killed James the brother of John with the sword (Acts 12:2).

It is interesting that three prominent members of the early church were known by the same name—James. (1) James, the brother of the Lord who later became the minister of the church in Jerusalem, and wrote the epistle bearing his name: (2) James the Less, or Younger (he was the son of one of the women called Mary, who was present when Christ was crucified, and (3) James, the son of Zebedee and brother of John (he is mentioned in the synoptic Gospels but not in the fourth Gospel). Perhaps John was reluctant to mention the exploits of his brother lest his motives be questioned. Yet it seems strange that additional information was not forthcoming, for James was one of the three faithful men who accompanied Jesus during the most intimate experiences of His life. All Christians know about Peter and John, but few seem to be aware of their companion. This study is an attempt to supply glimpses of James, the strong reliable man who never faltered during his association with the Savior.

A Sacred Duty... Demanding

He was the son of a very prosperous fisherman who lived near the Sea of Galilee. He and his brother John were probably junior partners in the family business, and it seems reasonable to believe they were associated with two other fishermen, Andrew and Simon. The fact that Zebedee employed "hired servants" suggests the business was very lucrative and well-known throughout the area (Mark 1:20). Zebedee was probably a very shrewd man who understood the temperament of his sons. John

114
was a dreamer, a mother's boy, affectionate, thoughtful, and kind. James, on the other hand, was quiet, businesslike, and a parent's perfect successor to a retiring father. He knew about fishing and in the event of his parent's death could be depended upon to continue the family's tradition. The aging father loved and appreciated John but was intensely proud of the elder son in whose hands the family's future rested. James was a methodical man who could handle customers, scrutinize and make decisions regarding equipment. While John talked. James planned how best to improve the family's affairs. He understood boats fishing conditions, and people. Zebedee was probably retained as an advisor. This preserved his dignity. self-esteem. and made him feel needed in the entire enterprise.

When John went off to hear a preacher from the wilderness. the father was not too surprised. That was to be expected of John who was interested in other things apart from fishing. Yet Zebedee was not too disturbed, for James was still there in charge of everything. Even when John returned with exciting news concerning a possible Messiah, the father was not too worried. The younger son was emotional, easily impressed. and impetuous. James, on the other hand, was dependable and practical. as solid as a rock. When John and James both announced their intention

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to leave their occupation to become assistants of the Preacher from Nazareth, old Zebedee was surprised, dismayed, and angry. Jesus had ruined his business and destroyed his family.

Many years ago, the Rev. Charles F. Guice, the pastor of the White Memorial Presbyterian Church in McComb, Mississippi, wrote a book entitled The First Friends of the Best Friend, and in it referred to another book The Glorious Company, written by co-authors Mygatt and Weatherspoon. Admittedly, the book was imaginative and fictitious, yet it might have been close to reality. They wrote: "Zebedee is not too surprised when John goes away to become a disciple of John the Baptist. A dreamer would do such a thing. The old man is a bit alarmed when John comes back with a new light in his eyes to tell James about a Man, called Jesus. Will John be able to persuade James to go? But he dismisses the idea; James is too practical. But James does decide to go and see about Jesus, and when he returns he has decided, to his father's dismay, to become a disciple. Why? The boy is leaving his business, his home, his future, his all. The old man is broken hearted. and refuses from

115

that time to have anything to do with James. No. it isn't too fanciful. It rings true to what we know."

A Sincere Disciple. . Departing

Now as he walked by the sea of Galilee. he saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And Jesus said unto them. Come ye after me. and I will make you to become fishers of men And straightway they forsook their nets. and followed him. And when he had come a little further thence, he saw James the son of Zebedee. and John his brother, who also were in the ship mending their nets. And straightway he called them: and they left their father Zebedee in the ship with the hired servants, and went after him (Mark 1:16-20).

If Zebedee were dismayed and angry, he could hardly be blamed. To lose two sons in one morning was crippling to the business, home, and future. It was to be expected that James, John, and Simon, who had been associated in the fishing business, would continue their friendship in the company of Jesus. but it is difficult to understand why Andrew was excluded from the continuing fellowship. He was a soul winner, he liked people. and possibly was looking for potential converts while the other men slept.

It is important to remember the Savior called people who apparently were not talented. He used "little people" who, although they were not able to preach sermons as did Peter on the day of Pentecost. they nevertheless "stood up with him" when he confronted an angry mob. When Peter preached to the crowds in Jerusalem. he had no idea what reactions would follow. The people who had crucified Christ were about to murder Stephen. and were capable of terminating Simon's life. Nevertheless, whatever the consequences might be, James and his brethren courageously supported Peter and were ready to die with him or lead converts to Christ. They were the "small people," the insignificant Davids who were not afraid of Goliath.

A Strange Denial ... Disturbing

And it came to pass. when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.

116

JAMES THE STRONG, STEADY, SILENT MAN

And sent messengers before his face: and they went, and entered into a village of the Samaritans. to make ready for him. And they did not receive him, because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did? But he turned, and rebuked them, and said. Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them. And they went to another village (Luke 9:51-56).

It might be easy to condemn James and John for their tempestuous outburst when the Samaritans refused to welcome Jesus into their village. Yet it is wise first to consider preceding events. They had just come from the Mount of Transfiguration where they had seen Moses and Elijah conversing with their master. Even the Lord's clothing had reflected the glory of God. Furthermore, a little earlier they had witnessed the overwhelming enthusiasm and gratitude of many Samaritans who declared to a woman of ill repute. "Now we believe, not because of thy saving: for we have heard him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). Evidently James was deeply disturbed, but believed that if he were given permission, he could emulate the action of the famous prophet and call down fire from heaven. The unfriendly attitude of the despised Samaritans was a terrible contrast to the enthusiasm of their kinsfolk in Sychar. On the spur of the moment. James decided it would be wonderful if they paid for their unfriendliness. Yet, when Jesus restrained the false enthusiasm, James did not argue. He accepted the authority of his Master. and accompanied Him to another village. The fact that Jesus called them "The Sons of Thunder" seems to indicate. "they were men of like passions as we are."

James was a loyal man: he never backed down from any challenges. He never ran. If it were necessary. he would confront not only men from a Samaritan village. He would also defy the hosts of hell, Other disciples denied, one betrayed his leader, and at times all wavered a little, but James was the man who stood firm, atoned for failure, and then resumed his service for Christ.

117

A Special Desire ... Disgusting
Then came to him the mother of Zebedee's children with her sons, worshiping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou'? She saith unto him. Grant that these my two sons. may sit, the one on thy right hand. and the other on the left, in thy kingdom (Matt. 20:20-21).

Peter. James. and John! We know a great deal about two of them. Peter was always prominent among the disciples and was greatly used by the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. He also wrote two letters that are included in the Scriptures. John was famous in his own right, and he also wrote five books which are in the Bible. But what is known of James? There is very little except that he was involved in a scheme to secure seats of honor within the kingdom of Christ. There is not any evidence that James was responsible for the request made to Jesus. Probably it was the result of a devoted mother desiring the best for her children. Perhaps James and John agreed to her suggestion because of their profound respect for their parent. What little is

JAMES THE STRONG, STEADY, SILENT MAN

known of James does not support the idea that he would seek notoriety at the expense of his brethren. He was the faithful, untiring man who became one of the leaders of the church. Unfortunately, the assemblies were soon deprived of his guidance-- for Herod the king. in an attempt to destroy the new movement, decided to murder the fearless Christian. All people are susceptible to praise, but there are still those within the church who continue to serve Christ even though they are never mentioned in any pulpit. They are the strong, reliable souls upon whom the Lord depends and without whom the church would never grow.

A Saddening Death.. Dismaying

Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hand to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword (Acts 12:1-2).

It is significant that Herod attacked James and Peter, but for reasons unknown, John was never apprehended. Luke recorded the deliverance of Simon Peter (Acts 12), but the other son of Zebedee laid down his life for the Savior. Evidently the authorities of those days recognized James to be a leader of the new

118

movement and hoped his demise would cause irreparable harm. Eusebius, an early historian of Christianity, tells a remarkable story which he claimed had been handed down from a lost work of Clement of Alexandria. It tells how the informer against James was so impressed by the testimony of the apostle before his judge, that he also became a Christian and they died together. On the way to their execution, the accuser asked for forgiveness, and after a moment's hesitation, James said: "Peace be with thee," and then kissed him)

James is the apostle of insignificant men and women. The Irish folk revere St. Patrick and the Welsh, St. David. but the citizens of all countries who feel forgotten and neglected can look with pride to the apostle James, who sealed his testimony with his blood. He surely had a great welcome when he rejoined his Lord in the land of endless day.

JAMES THE STRONG, STEADY, SILENT MAN

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119□

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