

James: The Second Son of Alphaeus

Sovereign Grace Baptist Church

October 16, 2005

Luke 6:12-15
Matthew 10:3; Mark 3:18
Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13

“And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. 13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; 14 Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, 15 Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes.”

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Once again we are faced with the challenge of studying an apostle about which little is known except His name. Once again we are forced to remember a practical principle—the message is more important than the man, even an apostle. A.W. Tozer once preached a sermon entitled

What Man is not to Glory in and Why.

His text was Jeremiah 9:23, 24.

“Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches...But let him that glorieth glory in this, That he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am

the Lord Which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness, In the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”

There is good reason, explained Dr. Tozer, why the mighty man is not to glory in his might or the wise man in his wisdom or the rich man in his riches. The reason is simple. The wisest of all men are really not so wise. Who has yet to explain the origin of life and the universe? While there are great advances in information, each door of knowledge that opens reveals a more complex and immense field of study.

In like manner the mighty man is not so mighty. Years ago, in 1927, when Jack Dempsey was fighting Gene Tunney for the heavyweight championship of the world, the event was billed as the fight of the century. One honest sports commentator was not impressed and made the observation that a half-grown gorilla could whip both contenders with no problem at all.

Living in a day that glorified the athlete and the power of the gladiators Paul reminded people that bodily exercise profiteth little. There is some profit but exercising to holiness is more important.

And the rich person should not boast in wealth. The One who gave it can take it away suddenly or, He can take the person from the money. In 1988, the death of Christina Onaiases was reported. She died at the age of 37. Though the heiress of billions of dollars she was not able to function normally in life. Drugs

did not help. Four marriages did not help. Like others before her, Christina was a poor little rich girl and she exited from life in a tragic way.

Power, education, physical beauty, money, or being an apostle must not be glorified in. Rather, a person can only glory in understanding and knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior. Jesus told the apostles not to rejoice in their abilities to heal the sick or raise the dead but “*Rejoice because your names are written in heaven*” (Luke 10:20). If we know little about the apostle James it is enough that his name is written in the *Lamb’s Book of Life*.

However, there are some things that can be said about James. Through careful study of the Scriptures three probable conclusions can be reached. First, he is the brother of Matthew. James is consistently identified as the Son of Alphaeus. Mark tells us that Matthew (Levi) was also the son of Alphaeus. Many Bible scholars are in agreement that Matthew and James were brothers but they were brothers who violently disagreed over politics and religion.

Matthew chose to unite with the Roman Empire in order to take money from his own people through taxation. As a result, he brought shame to his religious heritage and family tribe, which was the priestly tribe of Levi. In contrast, it may be that James chose to identify himself with the Zealots. The Zealots were a fanatical patriotic Jewish group whose single purpose was to overthrow the rule of Rome through every means including terrorist activity.

The evidence that James was at one time a member of this terrorist organization is slight but interesting. In the list of the apostles given by Matthew, Mark, and Luke, four disciples are consistently named together.

James the son of Alphaeus

Thaddeus (Judas, the brother of James)

Simon the Zealot

Judas Iscariot

In ancient documents each of these men are linked to the Zealots in some form. If James was the brother of Matthew as the son of Alphaeus and if he was a member of the Zealots then there must have been some intense hostility in the home of Alphaeus. One son was considered to be a traitor to Israel while the other son was constantly subject to Roman arrest. And yet they came together to follow Christ. It is a wonderful testimony to the fact that Jesus came not only to reconcile men to God but also, at times, to reconcile people to each other. There is not always a happy ending to conflict within families. The place of pledged love often becomes a battle ground for the launching of verbal, mental, and physical abuse. The *Bible* is realistic. There is sometimes much danger within families. There is much hatred and hostility as individuals try to control the behavior of others. The Holy Spirit faithfully records the unspeakable.

Cain killed his brother Abel.

Jacob robbed his brother Esau and lied to their father Isaac.

Even the Lord's own brothers and sisters thought that

He was mad for claiming to be the Messiah.

Jesus said that He came to put a sword in the home and divided husband and wife, father, and son, mother and daughter. Some of the greatest opposition to the cause of Christ comes from family members.

However, there is also the reality that when individuals submit to the Lord Jesus as Master, He has a wonderful way of transforming hearts. No longer do people need—or want—to hurt each other. They can be gracious again. It has been noted that a hundred piano's tuned to one instrument are tuned to one another and, a hundred Christians following Christ will care for one another. Here is a great lesson.

If Christian grace is to reign in a relationship then individuals must first be in love with Christ. The Lord can restore a broken relationship when He is honored and the principles of 1 Corinthians 13 are seriously applied to specific situations. The working together of a political zealot and a pawn of greed demonstrate the power of Christ and the gospel of redeeming grace.

Whatever else is known about James the son of Alphaeus is shrouded in legend and tradition. One interesting story has been preserved in the Golden Legend, a seven-volume collection of events in the lives of the saints dating back to AD 1275. The legend relates that James resembled Jesus Christ so much in his physical appearance that it was difficult to tell them apart—which is why Judas kissed the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. The killing kiss of Judas was to make sure that Jesus and not James was taken prisoner.

Having spent three and half-intense years with Christ, maybe James did begin to look like Jesus. Certainly it was his desire to be like Christ. That is a worthy objective of every believer.

*“O to be like Thee! Blessed Redeemer,
This is my constant longing and prayer,
Gladly I’ll forfeit all of earth’s treasures,
Jesus, Thy perfect likeness to wear.”*

Tradition records that James preached in Persia and that he died a martyr by crucifixion. The word martyr literally means *witness*. James was a witness for the Lord until the end of time.

There are two basic ways to witness for Christ: by life and by lips. The life of a Christian ought to be different in public and in private from the life of a person unconverted. There are certain things Christians should not do because they are fundamentally wrong. And there are certain things Christians should do because

they are right. The fruit of the Spirit can be manifested such a love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and self-control.

In addition to being a witness by living a virtuous life, there is the matter of the lips. The *Bible* says that faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the *Word of God*. But how shall people hear unless Christians witness to them and *tell* them the gospel?

In Acts 8 the story is told how all the Church was persecuted by Saul and had to hide for protection. “*Therefore, they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word*”. It is the church as a whole that must preach the *Word of God* and not just a select few. This point is essential to understand because it puts a responsibility on every man, woman, and young person to somehow, somewhere, *tell* others that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Being an effective witness for Christ takes desire and sensitivity, but the Lord will have His people witness for Him. He has given us apostles as examples. They in turn have given us their own lives to encourage our hearts to go forth with the good news of saving grace. We must do something for Christ whether we are remembered in detail or not.

The truth of the matter is that most of us, says Dr. Herbert Lockyer, “*are commonplace, having no exceptional gifts or powers. We are inconspicuous, simple, ordinary folk, models of mediocrity. Yet the common place character of our*

limitations should not make us indifferent about living to the full in our small corner. Much of the world's most needed and most blessed work is done by those about whom the world knows nothing."

Without question the best starting place to be a witness for Christ by life and by lip is in the act of baptism. Baptism is the will of the Lord. It is His holy command and so is not to be neglected or ignored. While it is true that baptism does not save in and of itself, and while it is true that baptism does not keep a person saved, it is also true that baptism is commanded. In Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus said, *All power is unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.* The Church has no option but to obey the will of the Lord. Every Christian has a Great Commission

to teach all nations and to be taught the things of the Lord;

to baptize all disciples and to be baptized as well;

to disciple others in the doctrines of grace

and to be students of the Word as well.

In the act of baptism several things happen.

First, the Lordship of Christ is honored. Many years ago, a number of prominent literary men were assembled in a plush clubroom in London one day. The conversation was directed to a discussion of some of the important figures of the past, and one of the company suddenly asked,

“Gentlemen, what would we do if Milton were to enter this room?”

“Ah”, replied one of the men, *“we would give him such an ovation as might compensate for the delayed recognition accorded him by the men of his own generation.”*

“And if Shakespeare entered?” asked another.

“We would arise and crown him master of song”, was the answer.

“And if Jesus Christ were to enter?” asked another.

“I think,

said Charles Lamb amid an intense silence,

“we would all fall on our faces”.

If Jesus has all regal power, and if Jesus has all saving power, then obviously He is to be obeyed. It is the will of Christ for His subjects to be baptized. It is the will of the Savior for those for whom He has died to be baptized because in the act of submission to baptism His Lordship is recognized.

Second, in the act of baptism a spiritual symbolism is expressed. By going down into the water the believer is buried in the likeness of His death. And when the person comes up out of the water, he is raised in the likeness of His resurrection. By the act of baptism every believer is identified with the substitutionary death of Christ. We do not have to die at Calvary—but Christ did. We do not have to go to hell to atone for sins—but Christ did. He took our pain and our just penalty in His own body and He asks us to identify with Him in that great work of redemption.

Third, in the act of baptism, the world knows that there is no turning back. This was certainly true for the early Jewish converts who came to Christ. By baptism they made a dramatic break with the past. Many Christians who have come out cultic structures or the occult experience the same radical cleavage. And there is no going back.

Fourth, in the act of baptism, the experience is such that it shall never be forgotten. There is a feeling of being born again because all sins have been washed away.

*“A ruler once came to Jesus by night,
To ask Him the way of salvation and light;
The Master made answer in words true and plain,
Ye must be born again
Ye must be born again
Ye must be born again
I verily verily say unto thee,
Ye must be born again.”*

Nothing illustrates the new birth better than the act of baptism.

Finally, in the act of baptism, great humility is revealed. It is somewhat embarrassing to be baptized because it does not happen every day. New situations are always a little uncomfortable for most people. But Jesus said, *“If you do not confess Me before men, neither will I confess you before my Father who is in heaven”*. To be ashamed of Christ is unthinkable for a Christian. For anyone who has never been obedient to the will of the Lord in baptism, the exhortation comes not to delay.

Of course the proper candidate for baptism according to Baptist tradition are those who make a conscious profession of faith in Christ. In Acts 8 when Philip spoke to the Ethiopian official about salvation, the man said, *“See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?”* *“And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. 38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him”* (Acts 8:36-38).

*“I’ll tell the world that I’m a Christian,
I’m not ashamed His name to bear;
I’ll tell the world that I’m a Christian,
I’ll take Him with me anywhere.*

*I'll tell the world how Jesus saved me,
And how He gave me a life brand new;
And I know that if you trust Him
That all He gave me
He'll give you.*

*I'll tell the world that He's my Savior,
No other one could love me so;
My life, my all is His forever,
And where He leads me
I will go."*

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I. What People Should not Boast About

- Power
- Education
- Physical beauty
- Money
- Being an apostle

II. Three Conclusions about James

- He was the brother of Matthew
- There was hostility in the home
- The gospel has the power to bring harmony to hearts
- He was a faithful witness for Christ

III. How to be a Witness

- Embrace those acts where the following takes place:
 - ❖ The Lordship of Christ is honored
 - ❖ A spiritual symbolism is expressed
 - ❖ The world knows there is no turning back
 - ❖ The experience is such it shall never be forgotten
 - ❖ Great humility is revealed.