

FROM SELFISHNESS TO SACRIFICE

Mark 10:35-39

Born approximately twelve years before Christ, James passed his uneventful childhood in the vicinity of the Sea of Galilee, his home being located at Bethsaida. His father, Zebedee, owned fishing boats, which he used on the Sea of Galilee, and was sufficiently prosperous to be able to hire his manual work in his business done by servants (Mark 1:20). Zebedee appeared once only in the gospel narrative, and that was when his sons left him to follow Christ. Likely he did not live long after that.

From the time when they were tiny boys James and his younger brother, John, had lived along the seashore, digging their brown toes into the sand, playing among the upturned boats, teasing and envying the men as they mended their nets and stretched them out for drying, shading their eyes as they looked out to sea, and dreaming of days of voyage and adventure.

From their boyhood these brothers were conditioned to the sight, sound, smell and pull of boats and sails with all their gear, rigging, ropes, nets and fish. Fishing was their vocation and means of livelihood. They never dreamed that Christ would come to them some day, call them from their boats and their nets, and make them fishers of men. Little did they think that they would sail not only on the Sea of Galilee, but also on the great and vast Mediterranean Sea, on voyages of adventure that would stir the hearts of men throughout the centuries.

James was a comparatively young man when he received Christ's invitation to follow Him. Like many of us, James was rather ordinary. There was nothing dashing or dramatic in him as there was in Simon Peter. James was not the type of person to be elected president of his class. He did not have any flair for the dramatic, and yet Christ chose him out of the multitude of disciples to be one of His twelve apostles.

In the apostolic band James, John and Peter constituted an inner circle which shared the confidences of and stood in closer relationship to Christ than the rest. They were the closest associates He had on earth, and were permitted to be with or near Him on the most sacred occasions of His life. This goes to show that one does not have to be a dashing, dramatic personality to be useful to Christ. A plain, sincere person is as welcome and as necessary as anyone. Christ leaned heavily upon modest and quiet James in times of special stress.

The Scriptures tell us very little about James. A half-dozen sentences tell us all that we know about him, but in them his character is fully revealed. This goes to prove that fame is not always the true measure of greatness, and that a man's reputation here is no index to his status in heaven. Most people do their deeds to be seen and heard of men. They want to be talked about and praised. Strong and dependable James did his work for the Lord out of devotion to Him and without striving for a great reputation. He not only occupied a leading place among the apostles, but he was the first of them to seal his faith with his blood and thereby win the martyr's crown.

Various things accounted for James going the way he did. One was the fact that he had a good father. More than nineteen centuries have elapsed, but he and his brother are still referred to as the "sons of Zebedee." Another factor was that James had a good mother. While it is true that Salome was ambitious for her sons, what good mother isn't? When the call came for their boys to pursue a way of life other than a business partnership with their father, neither parent raised any objection. A third factor in the case of James going the way he did was his brother. What a wonderful relationship is possible between an older and a younger brother! What a steadying force each can be for the

other! James and John loved each other and took great pride in each other, which was right. It is good to see a firm of brothers, and few things are more sad or cast a greater reflection on a family than a disharmony between children of the same parents.

While Zebedee, James, John and the hired servants were in the boat mending their broken nets, the Lord Jesus called to the brothers from the shore, saying, "Follow me." His voice carried the authority of deity and rightfully commanded the obedience of the brothers. In view of the attraction which they could not escape, and of the power upon them which they dared not resist, James and John knew that the time for action had come. With an unhesitating readiness of faith, and in obedience to that call, they immediately left their father and mother, their happy and comfortable home, their boats and nets, and their all and they followed Him.

Salome was with them heart and soul in the decision which they had made. A personal believer in Christ, she encouraged her sons in their devotion to Him. Willing to give up everything for Christ, Salome ministered to Him, followed Him on His last journey to Jerusalem, and was one of the sorrowing women who witnessed His final sufferings and who came to anoint His body on the morning of the resurrection.

James was particularly respected, loved and honored by the Lord. He belonged to the inner circle or the privileged three whom Christ often took with Him when the other apostles were left behind.

When our Lord entered the house of Jairus to have His first wrestle with death, He did not permit anyone to follow Him except Peter, James and John. In the bedroom or death chamber of the daughter of Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue, James saw Christ take the cold, pale fingers of the little girl in His own strong, warm hand, and he heard the Lord say, in a voice that even the dead obeyed, "Damsel, (I say unto thee,) arise." When she arose, there must have been in the heart of James the sure conviction, "This is the Prince of Life."

When Christ ascended that high mountain to experience His transfiguration, He took with Him the same favored three -- Peter, James and John. They were the sole witnesses of that never-to-be-forgotten event. When that glorious radiance played about the form of our Lord, James beheld His glory and vowed that he would never fail Him.

Just as the Master had called Peter, James and John to behold His glory on the mount of transfiguration, so He took them with Him to the garden in order that they might be the sharers of His bitter sorrow as He agonized beneath the crushing load of human sin. As He faced the grueling experience of the betrayal of Judas, He had James with Him for support and sympathy and the sheer strength which an understanding friend can minister when spirit is attuned to spirit. Christ chose James to be a companion because he cared. He leaned heavily upon him as a dependable and trustworthy friend.

In the first three Gospels only two sentences are attributed to James, and both of them are said to have come jointly from him and John. The reputation of both men would have been better had these sentences not been recorded. James had his share of human frailties, just as we do, and two incidents are not to his credit.

One occurred on the day that Christ and His apostles were going up to Jerusalem for the Passover. To go from Galilee to Jerusalem, they had to pass through Samaria. Samaritans and Jews mixed like oil and water. Late one day Christ sent two disciples into a Samaritan village to arrange for lodging for Him and His party during the night. The villagers behaved contemptibly. Maybe it was the fault of both the disciples and the Samaritans. At any rate, with bitter and insulting words they rudely refused to extend

hospitality to Him and His followers because they were Jews. In no uncertain terms they told Christ's messengers to get out and seek entertainment from their countrymen, the Jews.

As they left the village in the gathering twilight, a fierce and terrible indignation kindled in the hearts of James and John. Doubtless it was felt by the others, too, but the brothers put it into words, "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them" (Luke 9:54)? The fact that the people in this narrow-minded, hate-filled, hick town refused to let Christ stay overnight was too much for James. With his sense of the fitness of things, James thought that such ungenerous conduct towards One Who had never spared Himself in the service of men ought to be punished. He did not think that such inhospitable, inhuman, vindictive people deserved to live. In his zeal for the honor of his Lord, James would have removed those rude and churlish Samaritans from the face of the earth. Zeal is a beautiful and wonderful Christian virtue, but when it is uncontrolled and misdirected it can be a vice. Flaming and almost irrepressible zeal easily becomes intolerant, and the zealot quickly develops into a persecutor.

James' indignant outburst against the Samaritans, who would not receive his Lord into their village, certainly did not evince any love for them, but it did reveal that he had a great love for Christ. In him burned hot fires of protest against this affront to his Lord. James could suffer personal indignities in silence, but not an outrage like that upon his Master.

This insult brought to the surface all the flaming wrath of James and John, whereupon our Lord called them "Sons of Thunder," which signified much. Christ never gave a name without its being some indication of the character of the one bearing it. James did not receive the name, "Son of Thunder," because he possessed tremendous powers of oratory, but because of his fiery spirit.

These would-be persecutors received a stern and scathing rebuke from their Lord. We readily admit that their persecuting fury was foreign to the spirit of Christ. Yet, in their fiery intolerance there was a touch of nobility. Their flaming out in wrath was wrong, but, even so, a worse thing has come upon us today, in that we are able to witness insult done to our Lord without a quiver or a pang. Professing Christians today care so little for Christ that they can bear to hear Him insulted and maligned without becoming wrathful or even indignant. Something is lacking in any person who can hear his Lord insulted without indignation and pain. James has a message for the fearful in heart, for the timid in witness and for the faltering in faith.