

James – One Son of Zebedee “Thunder”

Key Passages: Matthew 10:1-4(2); Mark 3:14-19(17); Luke 6:13-16(14); Luke 9:51-56.

As we begin our study this evening, I want to ask you to share what your nickname is. That is, if it's safe to share... I'll start by sharing a few of mine. When I was younger, all the people at the church I grew up in referred to me as “Hoppy Baby”. This was because my dad's nickname was, of course, “Hoppy”. So, the first nickname I was given really didn't have any significance other than letting everyone know who my dad was. When I reached my sophomore year of high school, I had earned a new nickname that related to my wrestling style. If I could, I would shoot in on an opponent and lift them off the mat, hold them in the air and then gently place them back on the mat. This patently move, earned me the nickname: “Lifter”. Alright, it's your turn.

In our discussion of Simon, we learned that he was given a nickname which carried significance in who he ended up becoming as an Apostle of Jesus. What is the significance of Mark referring to James and John as “Boanerges” or “Sons of Thunder”? Mark's account is the only place in Scripture where this name is used. Perhaps Mark included it because he wanted to show how intimate Jesus was to these two. After all, they were part of his inner circle. (See Matthew 17:1) Maybe Mark also wanted us to understand that Jesus can know each of us at our deepest level, even our very nature.

Luke gives us the best insight to why Jesus may have given these brothers such a nickname. Let's read Luke 9:51-56. Why did James and John act in the manner we find here? It was a result of prejudice towards Samaritans. James and John's response to the Samaritans reveals a fervency, impetuosity, and anger that could properly be called “thunderous”—and we can be sure that there were other times when James and John lived up to their nickname.

We have little details about James other than he is a fisherman turned full time minister that is usually paired in Scripture with his brother, sometimes with Peter and at other times with Peter and Andrew. What we know about James is that he was characterized by his zeal, passion, and ambition.

Scripture also doesn't record any specifics about James' activities following Jesus' resurrection other than what we find in **John 21:1–11**. After the ascension of Christ, James was present on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) and did his part in fulfilling the Great Commission. Given James' outspoken nature, he was probably a bold witness for the Lord and led many to faith.

As Jesus had predicted, James experienced persecution soon after the church began. King Herod decided to arrest some believers, and he had James killed (**Acts 12:2**). James thus became the first apostle to be martyred.

The life of James the apostle shows us that Jesus knows our nature: He identified James as a “son of thunder” right away. Also, Jesus patiently works with us to conform us to His will, just as He did with James. We also learn from the life of James that courage in our service to Christ is an asset in spreading the gospel—although it can make us the target of persecution. At the same time, boldness should not be allowed to descend into brashness. Our zeal must be tempered with grace, expressed with love, and must be curtailed by a steady commitment to the will of God.