

## The Twelve: James and John

**Name(s):** James and John. Jesus nicknamed them 'Boanerges', the sons of thunder.

**Marital Status:** Unknown

**Home town:** Zebedee, (the father of James & John), was a fisherman of Lake of Galilee, who probably lived in or near Bethsaida, perhaps in Capernaum

**Profession:** Fisherman

**Age(s):** James 30 years old, John 16-18 years old

**Relatives:** Zebedee was their father, Salome was their mother.

**Social status:** Uneducated and had a fishing business with their father, and in partnership with Peter and Andrew. The fishing business was considerable as they owned several boats and employed servants (Luke 5:11; Mark 1:20).

**Personality:** Both brothers were loud, passionate (at times over the top), eager, fervent, forceful, self-centred.

**General facts:** We know little of James's interaction with Jesus, except those incidents with his brother. John was intimately associated with Jesus; he was the disciple whom Jesus loves John 13:23-2, John leaning on Jesus John 21:20. When Jesus was on the cross, He committed His mother to the disciple He loved, John (Luke 19:26-27). John is also credited with five books of the bible, the Gospel of John, 1,2 and 3 John and Revelation. These brothers, like with Peter and Andrew, left everything to follow Jesus!

**Position amongst the twelve:** Along with Peter, the brothers were part of Jesus' smaller ministry team. He would select this smaller group to accompany Him, exposing them to more than the rest of the disciples, because later they would play leading roles in the church. The healing of Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:29), at the raising of Jairus' daughter from the dead (Mark 5:37), at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1; Mark 9:2; Luke 9:28), with Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane (Matt 26:37; Mark 14:33). Jesus prepares these three uneducated, but passionate fishermen for three very different leadership roles in the church.

**Death:** James became the first to be martyred amongst the twelve, and the only one recorded in scripture. **Acts 12:1-3** - "1 About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. 2 He killed James the brother of John with the sword, 3 and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also."

Herod wanted to destroy the church, he would not have gone after James if he wasn't a threat. The influence he had was known by the Jews, so much so that it pleased them when Herod killed

him. It seems like James had a prominent leadership role amongst the twelve.

James was the first to die, John the last. John was never martyred, he died as an old man in Ephesus around 98AD, after having being exiled to the island of Patmos, because of his faith.

## MEET THE BROTHERS

In this series, we're learning how to be Christ-followers by looking at the lives of Jesus' twelve disciples. We integrate into a local church to become Christ-followers. It would be sad if we would become followers of the leaders here and not followers of Christ. You might recall that Paul rebuked the Corinthians for being followers of Apollos and Paul and forgetting about Jesus. Leaders may have a part of your life but we need to be desperately following Jesus.

We're looking at the disciples and seeing their humanity and watching how Christ dealt with them and transformed them. This then points to what we can expect and how we can develop the right character, and develop the mission, in our lives.

This time we're looking at James and John, labelled the Sons of Thunder in the Scripture (or the Sons of Zebedee). See their bio posted above. Why were they called Sons of Thunder? Because they seemed to be loud-mouths, always having an opinion. And look at their age - James was probably around 18 years old! In Cornerstone, we've ordained an elder of 19 years old and we got a lot of flack for it. But God is bringing us young guys and girls and we want to release them into ministry! Why should we wait? When God gets hold of a life, it doesn't matter the age.

We will look at John in detail later in this series, but focusing on these two brothers together provides many lessons. They were both good and not so good for each other.

## LESSONS WE LEARN FROM JAMES AND JOHN

There are three lessons we want to focus on from their lives. These will be valuable to us as Christ-followers.

**1. Jesus' revelation of Kingdom**

**2. Servant-hearted leadership**

**3. The need for passion or zeal**

Here's the scripture we are going to start off from:

### **Matthew 20 :20 - 28**

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom." Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?" They said to him, "We are able." He said to them, "You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father." And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.

The utter arrogance of these two boys! What's even worse is this account says Mommy did the asking. They thought Jesus was going to establish an earthly Kingdom and Salome wanted to make sure her boys were not left out.

But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be **great among you must be your servant**, and whoever would be **first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve**, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

We can see some of the principles of being followers of Christ here.

## **1. Jesus' revelation of Kingdom**

If you don't have a good picture of God's Kingdom you're not going to fully realise your potential and the desire God has for you in His Kingdom. There's always going to be a battle of your Kingdom and the world's kingdoms and systems versus the Kingdom of God.

Jesus taught the disciples to pray that His Kingdom come. Not that our Kingdom come. **Much of what is preached today as "Gospel" in Christianity has been reduced to a consumerism.** It goes something like this: If you come to church we can make you better. It's a self-betterment programme. We'll make your marriage better and we'll make you better. And why drive around in an Audi A3 when God has an Audi A5? It's become all about the values of the world and how we can improve ourselves and find success but God never said that - He called us to die and sacrifice and suffer on His part, because there's His Kingdom - a Kingdom not of this world, a Kingdom this world knows nothing about.

As we go through the Gospels Jesus progressively discipled his twelve in the values of His Kingdom. There were bad examples around at the time (see Matthew 9: 35 - 38) and Jesus came

teaching, preaching and demonstrating the Kingdom. Notice that He didn't come establishing *Jesus Christ Ministries International*. Jesus pointed to His Father, working under authority, on mission, being sent by God. Very soon in their ministry the disciples were exposed to the fact that when he spoke it was about the Kingdom.

Jesus preached and challenged people with the value of this Kingdom and its message – that you need to be born again. **This isn't about membership to a political party or a cause.** This is a life changing set of values coming from heaven via Christ and paid with by His blood. Jesus preaches and teaches and elaborates and demonstrates God's Kingdom, something that they hadn't seen in a very long time. What they had seen were the Pharisees on the streets, praying grand prayers, with fancy clothes and demanding respect. But there was no power – it was fake. We don't want our Christianity to slip into that with temporal values. It must be about God and His Kingdom and demonstrations of power.

Matthew 13 is great to read as it's a chapter devoted to the subject of the Kingdom. Christ was teaching and raising the twelve up so that when they were released to minister they wouldn't look to establish an earthly Kingdom but be there as ambassadors for this amazing Kingdom that Jesus died for.

After Christ's teaching in Matthew 13 we see the request of James and John and their mom above. We're in good company, aren't we? Sometimes it's as clear as day but we still look at temporal things and prominence. Something that satisfies the immediate. But it's about something far bigger than all that.

So we might think that James and John missed it here, and they did; but even worse – after Jesus has died and risen again, the disciples still ask him in Acts 1:6 if He's going to restore the Kingdom to Israel!

#### **Acts 1 : 6 – 8**

So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

This is after three and a half years of Jesus demonstrating the Kingdom and they still ask this question! Progressively, we need our minds and hearts renewed and refreshed in our understanding of Kingdom. Jesus tell them that “It's not for you to know times or seasons” and then gives his last word to the disciples before ascending into heaven.

You would imagine that these parting words are going to be his most important. It's His last challenge to them. They thought He was going to finally overthrow the Romans, sort out the Jews

who were traitors, and establish Himself as King of Israel. But what does Jesus say? What are his last words? (Vs 8)

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

See, right now something is being established. One day, the Kingdom of God will become the Kingdoms of this world, but right now it's being established. We need to know this.

Why were they thinking of the Kingdom coming in an physical, earthly sense? **Because it's about power. We want to be in power.** And Jesus promises them power, but not the kind they're thinking, saying that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them. That promise is for every one that is born again. **And what is the power for? To be His witnesses** – you go out and preach, teach and demonstrate His Kingdom. And to establish the Kingdom throughout the world.

This starts to make sense to the disciples in Acts 2 when the Holy Spirit comes and they see demonstrations of power, people turning, people being born again, systems of this world changing, the world being turned upside down. From that moment onwards they have the ability to establish the Kingdom of God all over the world. That's where we also come in.

Therefore, along with the apostles, we must have the same revelation of Kingdom. It's not about earthly power. The Romans ruled then and gave orders and lived in privilege, and the Pharisees too. **Titles and prominence are not important**, Jesus says we will not build like that. Earthly Kingdoms are here and now and self-seeking, God's kingdom is eternal and servant-hearted. It's other-centred. Christ did not come to be served but to serve. The currency of earthly Kingdoms is money, but God's Kingdom is that we're rich towards God. God challenges us financially in local church with tithes and offerings so that we're rich towards God. Fill your treasure house in heaven! Earthly Kingdoms talk about stocking it up here.

**God's kingdom is about glory to God, not prominence.** When we get the privilege of doing something great we give glory to God. Earthly Kingdoms are physical, God's Kingdom is spiritual. Earthly kingdoms satisfy the sensual pleasures and appetites; God's spiritual Kingdom satisfies the spiritual aspects – forgiveness, love, peace, hope. Earthly kingdoms are about happiness – a good exchange rate, a full back pocket. But it's temporal. With God there's always a source of joy, it doesn't matter the bank balance or the season, we choose joy.

It's about the King and Kingdom. We must grow in that revelation.

## 2. Servant-hearted leadership

### Mark 10:35-45

And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptised with the baptism with which I am baptised?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptised, you will be baptised, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." And when the ten heard it, they began to be indignant at James and John. And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "**You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.**"

The world looks for heroes. It's something our fallen human nature defaults to. We want to know about Kim Kardashian's latest breast operation and Jay-Z's house. Many people want to watch and know about every nappy change of Prince George's! The press oppress these folk who can't go anywhere without a photograph of them being taken. We want to see them when they're fat, thin, when they marry, when they fall. Our magazine racks are full of this! We want heroes and we love it when they fall. Right now, a whole channel is going to be dedicated to Oscar Pistorius' trial. People are going to devour it. Isn't that horrible? We follow every quote and tweet from so many people all over the world. Isn't it strange that those with the most are the most important? Some rich people in this world can't even use a normal toilet but insist on having a gold toilet! They can't even go to the toilet without extravagance! Why are they the heroes?

**But Jesus is the only hero.** Every knee will bow and tongue confess that He is Lord and rather do that now because one day it will be too late. Jesus deserved worship yet He didn't look for prominence. Even right at the end he washes his disciples' feet. He even washed Judas' feet, serving him! See, Jesus is the hero, he is the focus. We need to strip our lives from personalities and hero worship. It's a delusion.

The disciples died in obscurity. We don't live for the rewards here but our rewards in heaven. Jesus showed this to them. Leaders - it's about servant-heartedness! **As long as Christian leaders demand respect and subservience, people will never be set free.** When it's always about coming to watch the one guy or coming to applaud the ministry, no one will be set free.

Leaders are about setting the people free! The very nature of every believer is servant-heartedness (or it should be). You think it's about you, but it's not. It's not about any of us - it's about Jesus!

### 3. The need for passion or zeal

#### **Luke 3 : 15 - 17**

As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, John answered them all, saying, "I baptise you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

This fire of heaven is our inheritance. James and John were disciples of John the baptiser and they must have remembered what John said here about Jesus. Fire certainly suited their temperament. And they saw in Jesus' ministry a demonstration of power. He spoke and people were astounded; prayed and people were healed. They could see the authority in him.

#### **Luke 9 : 51 - 56**

When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem. And he sent messengers ahead of him, who went and entered a village of the Samaritans, to make preparations for him. But the people did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem. And when his disciples James and John saw it, they said, "Lord, do you want us to tell fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" (Some manuscripts add, "as Elijah did"). But he turned and rebuked them. And they went on to another village.

This was their nature, their passion and enthusiasm. In their ignorance and immaturity they show raw passion. At least Jesus had something to work with! There was conviction! Has Jesus got something to work with in our lives? Is it going to take atomic bombs before we get any sort of passion? There's an old saying that says, "If you don't stand for something, you're going to fall for anything." Do you have a conviction?

Jesus was single-minded. He was passionate about seeing the Gospel go out and help people understand the Kingdom. He was passionate to mould disciples and give them character that would see them season through season and not trip them up along the way. Because character can so badly disqualify us. And He was passionate to put a sense of mission in them, so much so that he passionately chose the cross and died - and then He commissions us.

James had passion. He became the first martyr as a result. Later on we'll see how John, a Son of Thunder, becomes the apostle of love. He suffers for the Gospel and fathers an incredible

amount of churches.

Passion flows from an inner-heart conviction for Jesus. It's not about stirring the crowd and hyping things up! **Hype doesn't change the world!** We're not cheer-leaders for Jesus! You can't give out what you haven't got. In those times when you find yourself confronted with situations where you know you should be passionate, your heart must change. Because it comes from the heart. If it's not passion it's just some kind of performance.

**Romans 12 : 11**

Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

**Psalm 103**

Bless the Lord, O my soul,  
and all that is within me,  
bless his holy name!

We must instruct our souls to bless the Lord, to take joy in Him. This isn't about feelings and waking up on the wrong side of the bed. We instruct our hearts. Be fervent in spirit. Serve the Lord.

**THREE QUESTIONS TO ASK:**

- 1. Do I understand that God's Kingdom is a spiritual Kingdom of power and redemption?**
- 2. Am I servant-hearted?**
- 3. Am I lacking in zeal?**