

The Disciples: James the Son of Alphaeus (James the Younger, James the Less) (Mark 3:18; Rom. 12:3; 1 Cor. 3:1-9)

Theme: Humility, all followers of Jesus can still accomplish the work of God without being in the limelight

A few years ago, I read a book called “Good to Great.” This is a book by Jim Collins about how companies went from beyond being “good” companies to actually being “great” companies. Collins and his research team looked at several different companies and compared many different things about what the companies did or didn’t do. One thing consistent about the “great” companies is that their CEO’s were humble. Even when they were rich, they were humble. They would look to themselves first when looking at mistakes. They would look out the window to other people to give credit to success as opposed to looking in the mirror at themselves. The companies that were successful but didn’t last had CEO’s that liked to talk about themselves.

Collins says on page 193:

“Shortly before his death, I had the opportunity to meet Dave Packard. Despite being one of Silicon Valley’s first self-made billionaires, he lived in the same small house that he and his wife built for themselves in 1957, overlooking a simple orchard. The tiny kitchen, with its dated linoleum, and the simply furnished living room bespoke a man who needed no material symbols to proclaim ‘I’m a billionaire. I’m important. I’m successful.’ ‘His idea of a good time,’ said Bill Terry, who worked with Packard for thirty-six years, ‘was to get some of his friends together to string some barbed wire.’ Packard bequeathed his \$5.6 billion estate to a charitable foundation and, upon his death, his family created a eulogy pamphlet, with a photo of him sitting on a tractor in farming clothes. The caption made no reference to his stature as one of the great industrialist of the twentieth century. It simply read: ‘David Packard, 1912-1996, Rancher, etc.’”

There is something that we all admire about humility and we all hate about people who talk about themselves. However, it is so easy to talk about our achievements and our successes. We all do it.

Today, we are going to talk about the disciple named James. This is James, the son of Alphaeus also known as James the Younger and James the Less. I am going to lay my cards on the table right now and tell you that we hardly know anything about this man named James. In a second, I will tell what we do know, but allow me to say that as we continue our study of the disciples, we will get to look at disciples that we know a lot about. So, if you want a lot of background info about a disciple, James is not that disciple, but wait, we will have more disciples to talk about. However, a theme today is humility. James was willing to serve Christ without being in the limelight. Or, whether he was willing or not, he did. So, the challenge today will be for us to be humble. The challenge is for us to be willing to serve Christ in humility. We must be willing to be like Packard was and do great things for Christ with little or no recognition.

- Now, let me tell you what we do know about James.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

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THIS SECTION AND MUCH OF THIS MESSAGE RELIES HEAVILY, ALMOST ENTIRELY ON A JOHN MACARTHUR MESSAGE THAT CAN BE FOUND AT:

<http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/42-80/common-men-uncommon-calling-james-simon-and-judas>

- There's a famous line in the Apocrypha, which is a collection of writings in between the Old and the New Testament, that says, "Let us now praise famous men." One writes about this quote: "Well that's the world's perspective. I can promise you, James the son of Alphaeus would never be on Larry King Live. He would never be on a TV talk show, he would never be invited to endorse a book, he would never be asked to pray at a conference. He would never be featured in a Christian magazine interview. He is just very, very obscure...James the son of Alphaeus."¹
- Now he had a name that was shared by some others.
 1. James the son of Zebedee who was the brother of John. And James is known to us and there are several incidents in the gospels where James appears.
 2. And then there was another James, the James the brother of our Lord. Our Lord had a half-brother born to Joseph and Mary by the name of James. He later became the leader of the Jerusalem Council and authored the epistle, James. But this James, the son of Alphaeus, is just obscure. We don't even know anything about Alphaeus.
- In Mark 15:40 he is called, "James the younger" or "James the Less." Little James. Now what does it mean? The word used to translate the word "less" or "younger" actually is the same word we get "micro" from. So, with James this could refer to his physical features, he could have been very small, just a little guy. And that's perhaps true. It may also be that he was young in age.
- So, unfortunately the New Testament tells us nothing about him.
- His distinguishing mark then is his obscurity. If we don't know anything about him, that in itself is an interesting fact. One writes: "Apparently he sought no recognition. He displayed no great leadership. Asked no critical questions. Demonstrated no unusual insight. Only his name remains and all his life and labors are sunk in obscurity."

¹ <http://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/42-80/common-men-uncommon-calling-james-simon-and-judas>

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- Some suggest that James was part of the political party of the zealots. Remember the zealots, which Simon was a part of?
 - **Historical tradition** tells us, however, that he was sent after Pentecost to Persia to preach the gospel, modern Iran, and there preached the gospel. The gospel was rejected by the power that was there and he was crucified for his faithfulness to Christ, just as his Lord had been crucified.
 - Others suggest that James was arrested by the Jews, thrown off the temple, and then beaten to death by a club.
 - There is something we can gather from his father being Alphaeus:
 - Now although Scripture doesn't say anything about him, there is an interesting thought. **MacArthur** points out: In Mark chapter 2 verse 14, Jesus passes by the tax office of Levi/Matthew, and notice this, he saw Levi, the son of...whom?...who?...Alphaeus. **Could it be that this James was the brother of Matthew?** That could be. There is no effort on the part of the Scripture writer to distinguish between the two Alphaeuses. That wouldn't be uncommon since Peter and Andrew were brothers and James and John were brothers. Why not these two? Why not James and Matthew/Levi?
 - Another thing that MacArthur points out is this: In the nineteenth chapter of John at the crucifixion of Jesus, there in verse 25, was standing by the cross of Jesus, His mother, Mary, His mother's sister, Mary, the wife of Cleophas," notice that name Cleophas? **Some scholars tell us that Cleophas is just another form of Alphaeus so that if this James was the son of the sister of Mary, he would have been Jesus' cousin.** Well, was James the cousin of our Lord? Was he the brother of Matthew? We don't know.
 - What we do know is that Jesus did hand pick James as one of His disciples and so he was chosen of God, though he was a normal disciple who lived in obscurity otherwise. He lived in humility, though he had given up everything to follow Christ (Luke 18:28).
- So, let's talk about humility for a moment and let's look at 1 Cor 3:1-9.

Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴ For

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when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?

⁵ What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶ I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷ So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸ The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labor. ⁹ For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.

- In the church at Corinth there were problems. There were problems as this passage reveals. They had divisions. Did you notice that Paul says some of them say they follow Paul and others say that they follow Apollos? It is almost as if they are competing with one another.
 - Paul had already brought up this issue in chapter 1:10-17. In that chapter Paul talked about these divisions. But Paul’s point is clear in verse 9. He writes: *⁹ For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building.* So, the point is not who baptized you or what apostle you respect the most. The point is that we are all working for God.
 - Notice in verses 5-8 we see this agricultural metaphor. Paul says that he planted and Apollos watered. They were all working for God, but they did different things to further God’s Kingdom.
- A strong application is here for today, but let me illustrate this:
 - I attended college at Cedarville University. Cedarville is a Christian school. They are Southern Baptist and they were also supported by the General Association of Regular Baptists. Now as I was about to graduate, I was seeking ministry employment. Now, though I attended a Baptist school, I was not part of a Baptist church. But I contacted the local leader of the Southern Baptist Convention. I told him my situation and my desire to serve in ministry. He told me that he knew of positions available so I should send him my information by email. So, I sent him my resume and a few other things. But he responded that there really aren’t many positions available and since I am not really Baptist, he cannot allow me to interview at the positions available.
 - Now, I call that following a denomination rather than Christ. There are many, so very many different Christian denominations out there. This is a stain on Christianity.

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- But that is a holistic, bigger church application. But an individual application is humility.
 - We are working for the Lord. It isn't about me as the one who baptizes someone, nor is it about me as one who first talks to someone about Christ. It is all about Christ.
 - We are all a part of God's plan. You may talk with someone about Christ, but they may not accept Christ. They may even reject Christ. That person is in God's hands and you know what? They may accept Christ later on. But you were still an instrument.
 - James was part of God's plan, but he served without being in the limelight. But he was still important. Jesus picked him as a disciple.

J. Oswald Sanders, in his book, *Paul, the Leader*, writes, "We form part of a generation that worships power---military, intellectual, economical, scientific. The concept of power is worked into the warp and woof of our daily living. Our entire world is divided into power blocs. Men everywhere are striving for power in various realms, often with questionable motivation."

The celebrated Scottish preacher, James Stewart, made a statement that is also challenging: "It is always upon human weakness and humiliation, not human strength and confidence, that God chooses to build His Kingdom; and that He can use us not merely in spite of our ordinariness and helplessness and disqualifying infirmities, but precisely because of them."

- 2 Cor 12: My grace is sufficient for thee, my power is perfected in your weakness.

Of course, as you may be thinking, this is something pastors must keep in mind as we are up front so often. I heard about a pastor who was voted the most humble pastor in America. And the congregation gave him a medal that said, "To the most humble pastor in America." Then they took it away from him on Sunday because he wore it.²

One of my preaching professors said that we cannot exalt ourselves and Christ at the same time.

So, Kenneth Collins book on leadership would applaud a man like James the less. He would applaud a man who didn't have to have all the attention and Collins studies would show that this is the type of leader who would have a most successful business. In Romans 12:3 Paul writes not

² Swindoll, Charles R. Read in *Swindoll's Ultimate Book of Illustrations & Quotes*. Thomas Nelson. Nashville, TN 1998. Page 278.

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to think of yourself more highly than you ought. James, the son of Alphaeus would live out that passage, as he served Christ without the attention.

So, I challenge you to be like James. Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought. In fact, think of others and their needs first. Instead, be willing to serve Christ without needing attention. Understand that we are all part of God's plan.

Napoleon Bonaparte:

"I know men and I tell you that Jesus Christ is no mere man. Between Him and every other person in the world there is no possible term of comparison. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have founded empires. But on what did we rest the creation of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ founded His empire upon love; and at this hour millions of men would die for Him."