

## **“The Twelve Disciples”**

### **Sermon # 10**

#### **The Final Three – the “lesser lights”**

James the Less: Simon the Zealot and Judas-the Apostle with Three Names

In the story of the creation we read that God created the sun and the moon as two great lights; the sun to rule by day and the moon to rule by night. He made the stars as lesser lights. As among the heavenly bodies there are greater and lesser lights so among the men who made up the Apostles there is also such a distinction.

[Herbert Lockyer. All the Apostles of the Bible. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972) pp. 167-168]

The disciples did not all share the spotlight to the same extent. There were those disciples who great lights, like Peter, James and John and there were those disciples who we do not know very much about.

Perhaps the final three disciples –the “lesser lights” should be more encouraging to us than those apostles that to us look like super saints. These “lesser” known apostles were just as important as the others and from them we can learn some valuable lessons. This is important because behind the scenes in any church there are always unsung heroes ... people who serve quietly, without public acclaim, doing things that are essential to the health and growth of the church. The truth of the matter is that the majority of Christians must be ready to serve God in this way...anonymously...with little or no accolades because there are not many spotlights for Christian heroes on this side of eternity.

First, James the Less remind us that though we may not be know or recognized by the world we are still important to God!

The only thing that the Bible tells us about this disciple is his name “*James the son of Alphaeus*” (Luke 6:15). You will remember that Matthew’s father’s name was also Alphaeus, it could be that James was Matthew’s brother. In Mark 15:40 he is referred to as “*James the Less*” which is probably a nickname. The Greek word for “less” is (*micros*) and literally means “*little.*” It primary meaning is “small in stature” but it can also speak of someone who is young in age. James the Less or “Little James” was probably a small, young, quiet person who stayed mostly in the background. He reminds us of the unnamed people mentioned in Hebrews 11:33-38: “who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, (34) quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. (35) Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. (36) Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, they were sawn in

two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented — (38) of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.”

Disciples like James the Less and the unnamed saints of Heb 11 remind us that though faithful, patient humble service may go unnoticed and unrecorded by men, it not forgotten by God.

So though we may not be know or recognized by the world we are still important to God!

Secondly, Simon the Zealot reminds that what we are zealous about is the most important thing!

In Luke 6:15 Simon is called “*the Zealot*.” In Matthew 10:4 and Mark 3:18 he is called “*Simon the Canaanite*.” This however, is not a reference to his being born in Canaan or the village of Cana. It comes from the Hebrew root (*qanna*) and means “*to be zealous*.” Simon was apparently at one time a member of the political party known as the Zealots. One other famous Zealot that you may remember was Barabbas; the man offered by Pilate and chosen by the people in the place of Christ. The fact that Simon bore the tag “*the Zealot*” for the remainder of his life may also indicate that he had a fiery zealous temperament.

The Zealots were ancient terrorists. They hated the Romans and their goal was to overthrow the Roman occupation. They advanced their agenda primarily through terrorism and underhanded acts of violence. They are not unlike the Moslem terrorists of our day. They believed that they were doing God’s work by killing Roman soldiers, political leaders and anyone else who opposed them.

When Matthew and Mark list the Twelve, they list Simon just before Judas Iscariot. When Jesus sent the disciples out two by two (Mark 6:7) it is likely that Simon and Judas were a team. Both men may have come to Jesus for political reasons at first. But some where along the line Simon became a genuine believer and Judas never really did.

It is interesting to consider that Simon had to associate with Matthew who was at the opposite side of the political spectrum. Matthew collected taxes for the Romans and Simon killed them whenever he could. I am sure that at one point in his life he could and would have killed Matthew, given the opportunity. In the end, because the both loved Jesus, they ended up working side by side for the same cause – the spread of the gospel.

What matters most in life is not our zeal but what we are zealous about. Some men are very zealous about their favorite sport, or favorite team or favorite athlete, and there is nothing innately wrong with that, unless that is all they are zealous about. The Bible reveals that it is possible to be zealous for the wrong reasons. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 10:2-3, “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. (3) For they

being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God."

Simon is a positive example of changing an improper zeal for that which has a lasting eternal purpose.

We need to be reminded that what we are zealous about is the most important thing!

Third, Judas the Apostle With Three Names, is a reminder that what we know is not nearly as important as what we do!

The last apostle that we are going to examine in our study is Judas. The name Judas means "*Jehovah leads*" and was at one time a popular name until the treachery of Judas Iscariot ruined it for all time. When the apostle John mentions this Judas (John 14:22) he adds "Judas – not Iscariot." Several of the disciples had double names but Judas is actually the only one that had three names. Matthew (10:3) refers to him as "Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddeus." Thaddeus means "breast child" and evokes the image of "momma's boy." Lebbaeus is similar it means "*heart child*". Both names suggest a man with a child-like heart.

"Taking the three names together, they suggest the thought that he was one of the youngest of the twelve, and was looked upon by the others with an affection which showed itself in the nicknames added to Judas." [Lockyer. p. 169]

The New Testament records only one incident involving Judas Lebbaeus Thaddeus found in John 14:19-24. In this text Jesus has been imparting that He will soon leave his disciples to return to be with the Father in Heaven. But he wants to assure them that he will not leave them orphans, that he will leave them with another comforter, the Holy Spirit.

In verse nineteen we read, "A little while longer and the world will see Me no more, but you will see Me. Because I live, you will live also. (20) "At that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you. (21) "He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." (22) Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, how is it that You will manifest Yourself to us, and not to the world?"

It should be noted that like Thomas and Philip before him he began his question by addressing Jesus as "LORD." His question is based on the fact that he could not understand why Jesus was manifesting himself primarily through this rag-tag group of disciples.

Jesus' answer to Judas is found beginning in verse twenty-three, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him. (24) "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me."

Jesus probably did not answer Judas as he probably wanted it answered. But he points out that love and obedience are all that we need to know. Anyone who truly loves “Jesus” will keep his word. Judas’ question reminds us that there are many things about the difficulties of living for Jesus that we do not know and can not know. But that is not important. What is important is that we love Christ and keep His word.

The final apostle, Judas, is a reminder that what we know is not nearly as important as what we do!

## Conclusion

I want to close with just a couple of reminders that can be drawn from the lives of the “Lesser Light” apostles.

First, although these disciples are not well known they were faithful. Even such obscure men as James the Less, Simon the Zealot and Thaddeus had their share in turning the world upside down for Christ.

Secondly, although they were little noticed they did their best for Jesus. Some of the greatest and most sacrificial work for the kingdom of God is done by those whose names are unknown.

I believe some of the greatest rewards in Heaven will go to people completely unknown to us. I want to close with this illustration.

“An elderly preacher was rebuked by one of his deacons one Sunday morning before the service. “Pastor,” said the man, “something must be wrong with your preaching and your work. There’s been only one person added to the church in a whole year, and he’s just a boy.” The minister listened, his eyes moistening and his thin hand trembling. “I feel it all,” he replied, “but God knows I’ve tried to do my duty.” On that day the minister’s heart was heavy as he stood before his flock. As he finished the message, he felt a strong inclination to resign.

After everyone else had left, that one boy came to him and asked, “Do you think if I worked hard for an education, I could become a preacher—perhaps a missionary?” Again tears welled up in the minister’s eyes. “Ah, this heals the ache I feel,” he said. “Robert, I see the Divine hand now. May God bless you, my boy. Yes, I think you will become a preacher.”

Many years later an aged missionary returned to London from Africa. His name was spoken with reverence. Nobles invited him to their homes. He had added many souls to the church of Jesus Christ, reaching even some of Africa’s most savage chiefs. His name was Robert Moffat, the same Robert who years before had spoken to the pastor that Sunday morning in the old Scottish kirk.

Lord, help us to be faithful. Then give us the grace to leave the results to you.

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