

The Twelve Apostles

Mark 3

LEVEL 5 – JAMES, ONE OF THE SONS OF THUNDER

Around the year 44 A.D. Herod Agrippa put to death one of the Lord's twelve apostles. (This is recorded at the beginning of the 12th chapter of the book of Acts.)

Disciples and Apostles

The third chapter of Mark lists the twelve selected to be apostles (the “disciples” followed the Lord during his ministry—they became “apostles” when the Lord *sent them out* to preach the gospel). We are selecting one (James) to concentrate on in this lesson, noting something about him that typified all of the apostles. The goal in a few paragraphs is to help you learn things you did not know before.



James

In English we read this man's name as “James.” If you saw the name of James in Greek or Hebrew you would say his name was Jacob. Yes, he was one of the many Jews named after the Jacob of the book of Genesis. Sometimes names are changed quite a bit when they move from one language into another. The change into English in this case was considerable. (Some have supposed that translators made it “James” to please King James in England. However this cannot be substantiated, since the name goes back earlier than King James.)

The Writings refer to him as “Jacobus,” and teach that Peter means “faith,” and John means “good works,” and James means “charity or love”.

One Who Grabs a Heel

The name “Jacob” is in itself strange, although for centuries it has been so widespread that we think of it as quite common. No individual was named Jacob before the day that twins were born to Isaac and Rebekah, one of them clutching in his hand the heel of his brother. It was because of this that he was named after the word “heel” or one who grabs a heel. (*Arcana Coelestia* 259) “Jacob” means someone so eager to get ahead that he would grab someone in front of him and supplant him (take his place). When the brothers grew, Esau said,

Is he not rightly named Jacob? For he has supplanted me these two times.
(*Genesis* 27: 36)

Remember that **eagerness to get ahead** as we look at the life of “James,” as we call him in English.

Information about James

1. James was the brother of John. In *Mark* 3 we read that this pair of brothers was given the name “Boanerges,” which means the “sons of thunder.”
2. Their father’s name was Zebedee. Scholars assume the family was well to do. We read in *Mark* 1 that they left their father and the hired servants in their fishing boat and followed the Lord.
3. There is evidence that James, along with Peter and John, were the three most important disciples. They were singled out to be with the Lord when others were not—at the raising of the daughter of Jairus, at the time when the Lord’s face was seen to shine as the sun, and in the secluded spot in the Garden of Gethsemane following the Last Supper.

Sons of Thunder

In the story in *Luke*, chapter 9, some people did not receive the Lord. The disciples James and John showed a zealous and impetuous spirit, saying:

Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them, just as Elijah did?

But the Lord rebuked their thunderous attitude and said:

You do not know what manner of spirit you are of.

The heel grabbing characteristic

The incident in which the heel grabbing characteristic (symbolized by Jacob) may be seen is recorded in *Mark* 10.

James and John approached the Lord saying:

We want You to do for us whatever we ask. (verse 35)

And what do you suppose they would ask? It was something that would displease the rest of the disciples. They asked if one of them could be on the Lord’s right and the other on His left in the kingdom which they were looking forward to.

They wanted to be the two top men in the Lord’s kingdom.

You see, the Lord allowed those men to have the idea that one day they would sit on thrones, and when there was strife among the disciples, it was over which of them would be the greatest. Of this the Writings say,

They could not think otherwise than that His kingdom in heaven is altogether like a kingdom on earth. And therefore, James and John asked that in His kingdom the one might sit on His right hand and the other on His left; and the rest of the apostles, who also wanted to be great in that kingdom, were indignant, and disputed among themselves which of them should be the greatest there. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8705. See also 8573)

The desire to get ahead was a typical “heel-grabbing” incentive with the disciples. The disciples at first had no other idea of the kingdom of heaven than that it was similar to kingdoms on the earth. They thought that they would become great there by exercising authority over others.

Serving Others Without Thought of Reward

The Lord at first used this simple motive to get the disciples going in the right direction (see *Arcana Coelestia* 3417), and then He gradually both taught them and illustrated to them that life is not a matter of just grabbing and getting ahead. Gradually they learned that the delight of heaven is the delight of serving others without any thought of reward.

It is really a tremendous thing to see, for we know that these men went to heaven. An ambition to be number one was used to inspire them to do useful things, and then the Lord gradually gave them a new heart and the realization that heaven is service to others. If they had not at first had the partly selfish incentive, the Writings say, they would not have followed the Lord, but would have returned to their occupations. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3857:7)

Application

What are the implications for you and me? If our motives are partly selfish at first, it is wonderful to consider that as we go along, the Lord improves our motives until we are not even worried about reward. It is a hopeful reality for all who would be disciples of the Lord.

In the chart on the next page, fill in some things that people do or strive for. Then try to think of both selfish motives and unselfish motives that might move people to do these things. Discussing this topic with your parents or friends will help you develop ideas. If you like, you can make this a personal exercise about your own choices.

But always remember, we are on a wonderful journey, a journey in which the Lord is leading us from selfishness to a state of charity “**which is void of all self-seeking, and is averse to everything that is for the sake of self**” (*Arcana Coelestia* 3419).

Activity	Selfish motive	Unselfish motive