

James the Son of Zebedee

The third apostle listed in Matthew is James the son of Zebedee (Matthew 10:2). Matthew likely refers to the father of James because it distinguishes this James from “*James the son of Alphaeus*” who was also an apostle (Matthew 10:3). Mark further sets apart the two James’s by revealing the nickname Jesus gave to both sons of Zebedee, James and John. Mark 3:17 says, “*James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, to whom He gave the name Boanerges, that is, ‘Sons of Thunder.’*”

The [Bible](#) does not explain why James and John were given this nickname. Many commentators offer an educated guess. Clarke writes in his commentary they were, “...probably so-named because of their zeal and power in preaching the Gospel.” Indeed, a case can be made from the Scriptures both James and John were zealous disciples of the Lord. In fact, the Scriptures record times when their zeal went a little too far. In one instance, Jesus rebukes James and John for their over-reaction to the lack of [hospitality](#) shown by a Samaritan village (Luke 9:51-56). In addition, the two brothers make a request indicative of an uneducated zeal (Matthew 20:20-28).

Outside of these instances, their zeal is commendable and the life of James may reveal the positive fruits of a zealous, fiery life given over to the Lord. In our study, we will simply detail the effects of zeal seen in the life of James.

First, the passionate desire of James to serve Jesus led him to leave behind his work and his father. As James and John are called to follow Jesus, Matthew 4:22 records, “...*immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed Him.*” Choosing to follow Jesus quite often causes us to leave some part of our life behind. James is willing to walk away from the family business to be part of a much greater work. Christians are called to leave behind every hindrance and snare to wholeheartedly follow the Lord (Hebrews 12:1-2). Sometimes, this includes our own families (Matthew 10:34-37).

Second, true zeal leads to an intimate relationship with the Lord. As we read the Scriptures, few disciples are with the Lord more often than James. His presence with the Lord at the miraculous catch of fish was what prompted his decision to follow the Lord (Luke 5:10). James is with Jesus as he heals Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 1:29). He is present at the healing of Jairus’ daughter (Luke 8:51). He is one of three apostles present at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:1). He waits with Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, prior to the betrayal and crucifixion (26:37). He asks Jesus questions (Mark 13:3), tours with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem (Luke 9:52,54), and even his mother is acquainted with Jesus (Matthew 20:20-23). Finally, he is one of the apostles mentioned as being on the Sea of Tiberias as Jesus appears after His resurrection (John 21:2). Like a magnet, James was drawn to Jesus.

The key point is this: if we have true zeal we will want to put ourselves in a position to learn about the Lord. We will study and attend [Bible studies](#) and worship services and make friends with Christians who can edify us (Hebrews 10:24-26). Those who lack a zeal for God are often those who refuse study opportunities.

Third, the zeal of James certainly helped the zeal of his mother. The mother of James, Salome, is one of the women mentioned as observing the crucifixion of Jesus and coming to the tomb on the resurrection morning to anoint the body of Jesus (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; Mark 16:1). Could it be her interest in the Lord was sparked by the zeal of her sons? Sometimes, the key factor in influencing our friends and family can be either our passion or indifference towards the Lord!

Finally, James is the first martyred apostle. Acts 12:1-2 says, “...*Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.*” James would not have been persecuted by Herod if he were not a well known and zealous disciple in the early church. If he had been content with mediocrity Herod would have never touched him. Yet, his zealous actions led to a zealous reaction from the enemies of Christ. Such is promised to all who would try to be a “son of thunder” for the Lord (Matthew 5:10-12).