

I. INTRODUCTION

A person's character is very difficult to change. 'But it can be done, though it takes time. Today let us study the character of John and James, and see what we can learn from them. NOTE: We have many passages for study today. Together they form a big picture. Only the central thought for each passage will be studied, so don't get bogged down with details.

II. BIBLE READINGS

Note for the teacher: Please read together the verse every topic in the discussion below.

III. DISCUSSION

A. The Call And Selection (Mark 3:13-19)

Mark 3:13 Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. 14 He appointed twelve- designating them apostles- that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15 and to have authority to drive out demons. 16 These are the twelve he appointed: Simon (to whom he gave the name Peter); 17 James son of Zebedee and his brother John (to them he gave the name Boanerges, which means Sons of Thunder); 18 Andrew, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Thaddaeus, Simon the Zealot 19 and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

From among many of the disciples following Jesus, Jesus chose 12 men to be His apostles.

1. To which three apostles did Jesus add new names? (vv. 16, 17)
2. What does "Sons of Thunder" suggest to you about the personalities of James and John?

B. The "Mountain Top Experience" (Luke 9:28-36)

Luke 9:28 About eight days after Jesus said this, he took Peter, John and James with him and went up onto a mountain to pray. 29 As he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became as bright as a flash of lightning. 30 Two men, Moses and Elijah, 31 appeared in glorious splendor, talking with Jesus. They spoke about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem. 32 Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him. 33 As the men were leaving Jesus, Peter said to him, "Master," it is good for us to be here. Let us put up three shelters- one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. (He did not know what he was saying.) 34 While he was speaking, a cloud appeared and enveloped them, and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. 35 A voice came from the cloud, saying, "This is my Son whom I have chosen; listen to him." 36 When the voice had spoken, they found that Jesus was alone. The disciples kept this to themselves, and told no one at that time what they had seen.

1. Who did Jesus take with Him up the mountain? (v. 28) What does this show?
2. What happened at the mountain top? (vv. 29-36) What did it mean for Peter, James and John?

3. Many of us have our own “mountain top experience” wherein we felt close to God and we came into a deeper knowledge of our Lord, as if we have seen Him “with our own eyes”. Share them.
4. Let us review what we have learned so far. First we see that among the many people following Jesus, James and John were among the twelve chosen to be apostles. Then we see them go through a “mountain top experience”. We would expect James and John to be very “spiritual” now, to have their character changed from being “Sons of Thunder” to kinder, more loving persons. Let us see if this has happened.

C. Thunder Again! (Luke 9:46-56)

Luke 9:46-55 An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. 47 Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. 48 Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all- he is the greatest. 49 “Master” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.” 50 “Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “for whoever is not against you is for you.” 51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, “Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?” 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them,

This incident happened after the “mountain top experience” in Luke 9:28-36

1. How did the argument of the disciples among themselves reflect their desires and priorities?
2. How did our Lord correct them? (vv. 47, 48)
3. How would you describe John’s attitude in v. 49?
4. What happened when Jesus sent messengers to a Samaritan village? (v. 53)
5. When James and John saw this, what did they propose? (v. 54)
6. What does this show of their character?
7. James and John had followed Jesus for three years now. They had been part of the inner group who received special attention, and had been through 8 “mountain top” experience. Jesus was about to finish His mission on earth (v. 51). But James and John remained as selfish (vv. 46-50) and as hot-tempered as ever (v. 51-56). Is it really impossible for one’s character to change? Let us see what happened to James and John afterwards.

D. James The Martyr (Acts 12:1-2)

Acts 12:1 It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. 2 He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.

This happened after Pentecost. The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and witnessed for our Lord boldly.

1. What happened to James? (v.2) b. Why was he executed?

2. If James had his old character of selfishness, would he have allowed himself to be arrested and executed? What does this show then?

E. Love (1 John 4:7-12)

1 John 4:7-12 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. (NIV)

1. Who wrote this passage?
2. What is the central message of this passage?
3. Contrast the love that John is now speaking of with what he was before. In what ways was he not loving before? Now, how loving is he?

IV SUMMARY

What lessons can we learn from today's studies?

1. It was after Pentecost that James and John were finally changed. Only when the Holy Spirit works in our heart can we be truly changed. Many of us continue to view godliness/Christ-likeness as a self-project - "I must... I must not..." But changing our character is the fruit of a life maturing in Christ. So we should seek to love, obey, etc. and then change will be a result of maturing in our faith. Share experiences in this regard.
2. Regarding others: Let us not expect too much from others. Let us not say, "He is a Christian, even an officer (or adviser), yet he is still like that. What a hypocrite!" Let us be patient, for we now know that it takes quite some time for a person's character to change. Let us be aware of the difficult struggles within that person, and pray for him.
3. The process of transformation is an ongoing process. Let us take heart what Philippians 1:6 says, "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

REFLECTION: What have been the changes in my character since I became a Christian? What more needs to be changed?