

The Disciples of Jesus: James, the martyr

Although I've named the message James the martyr, he was by no means the only martyr. Jesus had prophesied that his followers would be persecuted and even killed for his sake. During his time Herod killed all the male children two years old and younger in Bethlem and surrounding areas when Jesus was born. He had John the Baptist beheaded and later killed James with the sword. Prior to James' martyrdom Stephen was killed by the Jews with the approval of Saul who became Paul. James was merely a forerunner of many Christian martyrs who to this day have fulfilled the prediction of Jesus that they would be killed for their faith in him. How strong is your faith? Would you stand up for your faith in the midst of persecution?

Mark 10: 35 – 40 And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came up to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What do you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" And they said to him, "We are able." And Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized, but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared."

1) The ambition of James

- There isn't much said about James, the son of Zebedee and brother of the apostle John, in the Bible. However, there are four people named James mentioned in the Bible, and we shouldn't get confused who we're talking about.
 - James, the son of Zebedee the fisherman. This is who I'm talking about in this message.
 - James, the son of Alphaeus, was another rarely mentioned apostle
 - Judas, another apostle, the son of another James.
 - James, the brother of Jesus, was a probable leader of the church in Jerusalem in Acts 15 as he culminated the discussion on the issue of circumcision and the requirements for Gentiles to be saved. He was also the probable author of the book of James.
- James, along with his brother John and their mother, were either full of faith or they had reckless ambition.
- They approached Jesus with confidence.
 - Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.
 - This is a bold statement. However, it was a very self-centred request.
 - We want you to do for us
 - It was about what they wanted and not what Jesus wanted for them.
 - They asked with the wrong motives
 - James 4: 2 – 3 You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.
 - ...whatever we ask of you.
 - This is a very bold and presumptuous request.
 - They had probably taken Jesus teaching on making requests seriously, although they had misunderstood that whatever they asked according to his will would be granted and not merely anything they wanted him to do for them.
 - John 15: 7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.
 - 1 John 5: 14 – 15 This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him.
- We ought to have the confidence of James and John when approaching Jesus to make requests, but we need to know whether what we're requesting is according to his will or not.
 - Having prominent seats of power and prestige is not according to his will as he went on to teaching on leadership in the kingdom that leaders should not lord it over people but to be servants of people.
 - James and John, and their mother, were looking for seats of power and prestige.

2) The prediction of Jesus

- Jesus corrected James and John by telling them that they don't know what they were asking.
- He not only corrected them but told them what they probably didn't want to hear, although they probably misunderstood what he said.
 - Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?
- This sounds like an easy task to follow until we understand what Jesus was really saying.
 - Although James and John didn't yet know what was going to happen Jesus was referring to the same event in two different ways.
 - The cup was the cup that he was going to take at his last Passover meal stating that it was to be his blood shed for the forgiveness of sins. It also signifies the cup of the wrath of God that would be poured out onto him.
 - The baptism was a baptism of death on behalf of a sinful world. He wasn't referring to baptism in water or the baptism of the Holy Spirit.
- In essence what he asked James and John is whether they would be able to endure the unjust sufferings that he was going to suffer.
- Once again, we aren't sure whether they really understood Jesus' questions or the implications thereof, as they quickly replied that they were able to do that.
- Jesus affirmed that they would indeed suffer in the way that he was going to suffer, although not necessarily in the same methods.
- This was contrary to what they originally asked.
 - They asked for seats of power and prominence, but Jesus promised them suffering and death.
 - He didn't quash their hopes of being seated with him in glory, but merely stated that it wasn't for him to grant.
- How often Jesus answers our requests completely differently from what we expected, but he never leaves us without hope even in the midst of suffering.

3) The martyrdom of James

- For James his sufferings came sooner than John's as he was killed by Herod in Jerusalem.
 - Acts 12: 1 – 3 About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. He killed James the brother of John with the sword, and when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also. This was during the days of Unleavened Bread.
- The prediction of Jesus came true, as all his predictions did, and will still come true.
- Jesus didn't predict this for James as an isolated event, but as the norm for his followers.
 - Luke 21: 10 – 19 Then he said to them: "Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.
"But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. And so you will bear testimony to me. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life.
 - Acts 14: 22 "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.
- James, Stephen, and the other disciples who were martyred for their faith were merely forerunners of the many Christians who would be killed for their faith throughout the ages to the present day.
- Data, attributed to the late researcher David B Barrett, puts the number of Christians martyred since the time of Jesus at 70 million.
- If Jesus asked you the question that he asked James and John, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?", what would your answer be?
 - Would you be like them and say, "We are able" and then stand up for your faith like they did?
 - Or would you rather go back to the world where it's safer? Or is it safer?
 - Matthew 10: 32 – 33 "Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.