



"When principles that run against your deepest convictions begin to win the day, that battle is your calling, and peace has become a sin. You must, at the price of your dearest peace, lay your convictions bare before friend and enemy, with all of the fire of your faith."
—Abraham Kuyper

14-Aug-15

Sons of Thunder (Part Two)

[Jesus](#) gave surnames only twice to His disciples, as we saw in Part One. To Simon, He gave the surname "Peter," which means a "stone," and to the sons of Zebedee, James and John, He gave the surname, or perhaps nickname, *Boanerges*, which is translated as "Sons of Thunder." Commentators believe that the latter name reflects James' and John's zeal to do God's work. The episode in [Luke 9:53-56](#) certainly depicts two fervent men taking [offense](#) on behalf of their Lord, but the zeal was misdirected and destructive.

A second episode that may answer why they were named "Sons of Thunder" is quite a bit different, but it does reflect a kind of zeal—or perhaps ambition. The episode concerns their request to sit at His right and left hand in the Kingdom ([Matthew 20:20-21](#); [Mark 10:35-37](#)). Matthew writes that their mother Salome made the request, but Mark records that James and John did the asking. There are perhaps three ways we can look at this:

First, Salome may have been trying to make sure her sons received the recognition or position she thought they deserved, perhaps selfishly ignoring

the others. James and John were certainly of age to speak for themselves. Why did their mother have to do it? It is something to weigh in terms of their thunderous zeal. Were they at this point hiding behind Mom?

Second, they selfishly sought the position for themselves without regard for the other disciples. Intent on securing their place beside Christ, they were arrogantly playing "climb the ladder" over the backs of their fellows. This could account both for Jesus' reply concerning their being willing to suffer as He did and for the other disciples' displeased reactions.

Third, and much more plausible, they truly were zealously dedicated to serving Christ, and they wanted to do whatever it took. Speaking of James, he appears to have been a man who was ready and willing to do whatever the task called for, as shown by his martyrdom. It also seems that he did not mind taking a back seat, perhaps to his younger brother John. Herbert Lockyer, in *All the Apostles of the Bible*, describes James as one who was "resolute, vigorous, active and forceful, while John was contemplative, intuitive and reflective." James and John do not appear to have been selfish, but men of action ready to meet a challenge. Perhaps we could compare them to athletes who have the mindset that they should be the one batting in the bottom of the ninth down by a run with a man on base, two outs, and two strikes—ready for the challenge!

What do we know about thunder that may help us? Thunder, of course, is the sound caused by lightning. Technically, it is a sudden increase in temperature and pressure from a lightning bolt, which produces rapid expansion of the surrounding air. This expansion of air creates a sonic shock wave, similar to a sonic boom, which is what we hear. For many, it is a fearful thing, even terrifying. Thunderstorms often scare pets, making them whine and shake or dive under the nearest piece of furniture!

Many people [love](#) to hear a thunderstorm coming. Watching them move across the ocean or over a lake is particularly awesome; for some reason the sound seems even more spectacular when vibrating across the water. We have all experienced the flash of the lightning and anticipated the boom that follows. This is a common occurrence in the American South with its hot humid summers.

Strong's Concordance defines the Hebrew word for thunder, *qol*, as "to call aloud; a voice or sound," as in a thundering voice or a proclamation. Another word translated as "thunder," *ra'amah*, describes violent agitation or vibration like the shaking of a horse's mane or something "quivering in the wind." The New Testament Greek word, *bronte*, originally meant "to roar."

The Dictionary of Biblical Imagery adds: "Thunder's physical properties [are] a force of terrifying power beyond the human [realm]. . . . The primal imagination links thunder with the presence, power and wrath of deity. In the Bible, accordingly, most references make thunder a manifestation of [God](#)."

Thunder may be used in the Bible to describe the voice of God more than in any other descriptor. In [Job 40:9](#), God Himself asks Job, "[C]an you thunder with a voice like [Mine]?" In [Psalm 18:13](#) David writes of God, "The LORD thundered from heaven, and the Most High uttered His voice, hailstones and coals of fire." Again, in [Psalm 29:3](#), he says, "The voice of the LORD is over the water; the God of glory thunders" (see also [Psalm 77:18](#); [81:7](#); [104:7](#)). The next time it thunders, we would do well to pay attention. We might be hearing the voice of God!

In the plague of hail on Egypt, God also used thunder as a weapon ([Exodus 9:13-35](#)). Not only was the hail falling and causing fires, but the thunder went on and on, so much so that Pharaoh, it appears, begged [Moses](#) to make it stop! God later used it against the Philistines ([I Samuel 7:10](#)), and according to the [book of Revelation](#), it will be used again ([Revelation 16:18](#)).

In [Mark 1:17](#) is Mark's version of the calling of the four fishermen, Peter, Andrew, James, and John. When Jesus calls the disciples, He says; "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men." When we read this, the emphasis always seems to fall on the phrase "fishers of men." Our eyes just seem to hop right over the first part of that sentence, "I will make you."

Many have felt that God called them because of what they had to offer or that they had some trait that He was looking for. A trait or two may indeed have caught God's eye, but the Christian calling is nothing short of a miracle, and we are mere clay in the Potter's hands. When all is said and done, and we

are able to grasp what God has made of us, we will be astounded! Part of that realization may be the ability to recognize just how small a part we actually contributed.

When Christ called James and John "Sons of Thunder," could He have been prophesying to them of what they would become? That is, was He describing what He was creating them to be? Instead of James and John thundering off in the wrong direction, Jesus lets them know that He had called them to be voices of God! Their witness to [the world](#) has certainly proclaimed God's way for the last two thousand years.

- Ronny H. Graham

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[The Two Witnesses \(Part Two\)](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Both Ezekiel and John experienced bitterness from ingesting the little book. God's truth may bring about sadness, astonishment, anger, and bitterness to the one delivering the message. James and John, displaying violent somewhat destructive zeal, serve as the prototypes of the Two Witnesses, who will have developed controlled, purified zeal (Mark 3:14). A major role of the Two Witnesses is to measure the spiritual Temple, evaluating the condition of the church, purifying its worship, and ensuring the people are pure before God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

by

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