

# Twelve Ordinary Men: James the Son of Alphaeus

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Date: 21 May 2023

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn to the Gospel according to Luke, Luke chapter 6, Luke chapter 6, and we're reading at verse 13.

It's on page 1039 in the Pew Bible, Luke chapter 6, and verse 13. This is the verses we've been reading each Lord's Day.

It gives to us this list of learners and this list of disciples. So Luke chapter 6, verse 13. And when day came, Jesus called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles, Simon, whom he named Peter, and Andrew, his brother, and James and John, and Philip and Bartholomew, and Matthew and Thomas, and James, the son of Alphaeus, and Simon, who was called the Zealot, and Judas, the son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor.

This evening, we're continuing our study of the disciples of Jesus. And as we've discovered in our study, the disciples of Jesus were just twelve ordinary men.

There were twelve ordinary men who were called, commissioned, and commanded to serve their extraordinary God. They weren't rich or religious men. They weren't the best or the brightest men.

[ 1 : 40 ] They weren't the smartest or the sharpest men. They weren't the clearest or even the cleverest men. But they were just twelve ordinary men with many faults, many flaws, many failings, and many foibles.

And among them, we know them quite well. Among them were deniers, and deserters, and doubters, and a defector. But of course, that's what makes them worth studying.

Because as disciples of Jesus in the 21st century, we are just ordinary men and women with many faults, flaws, failings, and foibles. And we often feel like these twelve ordinary men.

We feel like we're deniers, and deserters, and doubters, and sometimes even defectors. Which is why it's good for us to learn from their experience, and to learn from their example.

Because these twelve ordinary men, they remind us, and they reassure to us, the simple fact that they were just like us. They were just like us. They weren't on this super pedestal.

[ 2 : 40 ] They were just like us. In fact, it's their character, and their conduct, and their conversation that make them so real, and so relevant to us as disciples in the 21st century.

And so this evening, we're considering the character, the conduct, and the conversation of the ninth disciple in this list of learners. He is James the son of Alphaeus.

James the son of Alphaeus. But the thing about James the son of Alphaeus is that there's nothing really written about his character, or his conduct, or his conversation.

We're not told much about him. We're not told how he acted. Or what he did, or where he went, or what he said, or what he was like. There's not much to go on, which makes it quite difficult to prepare a sermon about James the son of Alphaeus.

And yet, I hope and pray that we can draw something out of it this evening, so that we can learn from the experience and the example of this man, James the son of Alphaeus. And so this evening, I'd just like us to consider James the son of Alphaeus under two headings.

[ 3 : 49 ] James the learner and James the lesser. James the learner and James the lesser. So first of all, we see that he's James the learner.

James the learner. You know, with our first heading, I know that I'm stating the obvious, that he's James the learner. But I state the obvious for good reason.

Because like all the disciples of Jesus, James the son of Alphaeus was a learner. Because as we said many times before, as we said in this study of these disciples, a disciple is a learner.

That's what the word disciple means. It means learner. You have your L plates on. You're learning. We're all learning, and we're learning together. And we'll keep learning until our graduation in glory.

And so James the son of Alphaeus was a learner. He was James the learner. He was James the learner. And he was James the learner because like every disciple of Jesus, whether in the first century as it was for him, or in the 21st century as it is for us, every disciple of Jesus has been chosen, called, and commissioned to be a disciple of Jesus.

[ 5 : 03 ] Like every disciple of Jesus, James the son of Alphaeus was eternally chosen. He was eternally chosen. And he was chosen and elect from before the foundation of the world to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

And like every disciple of Jesus, James the son of Alphaeus, he was eternally chosen and then effectually called. And he was effectually called, as we've seen with the other disciples, he was called by Jesus Christ through the work of God the Holy Spirit.

Where James the son of Alphaeus, he was convinced of his sin and misery before a holy God. He was enlightened in his mind with the knowledge of Christ.

More than that, his will. His will that was once in bondage to sin, that always had this inclination towards sin. His will was renewed.

His will was released so that he was enabled to embrace Jesus Christ as he was freely offered to him in the gospel.

[ 6 : 06 ] My friend, like every disciple of Jesus, James the son of Alphaeus, he was eternally chosen. He was effectually called and he was evangelistically commissioned.

He was evangelistically commissioned to go, like every other disciple, to go and make disciples of all nations. By baptizing and by teaching in the name and in the power of Jesus Christ.

My friend, like every disciple of Jesus, whether in the first century or in the 21st century now, just like every other disciple, James the son of Alphaeus was eternally chosen, effectually called and evangelistically commissioned to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

But James the son of Alphaeus, we're told, was also an apostle. We read each week in this list of learners that when these 12 ordinary men were eternally chosen, effectually called and evangelistically commissioned to be disciples of Jesus, these 12 men were also named apostles.

These 12 men were also named apostles. They were the sent ones, the first sent ones, because that's what the word apostle means. It means sent one. Therefore, like all the disciples, James the son of Alphaeus, he was eternally chosen, effectually called, evangelistically commissioned to be an apostle of this risen, ruling, and reigning Savior, Jesus Christ.

[ 7 : 38 ] He was a blessed man. James the son of Alphaeus was a blessed man. If we learn anything about this man, he was a blessed man.

Because like every disciple of Jesus, so if you're a disciple of Jesus this evening, you're a blessed man. You're a blessed woman.

You're blessed because you have been eternally chosen, effectually called, and evangelistically commissioned to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. But of course, James the son of Alphaeus, he not only shared the same role and the same responsibilities as these other 11 men, he also shared the same name as some of them too.

Because as you know, James the son of Alphaeus, he wasn't the only James who was eternally chosen, effectually called, and evangelistically commissioned to be a disciple of Jesus.

As you can see from our list of learners, there are two Jameses among these 12 ordinary men. Evidently, James was and still is a popular name.

[ 8 : 48 ] In fact, it's one of the top 10 boys' names of all time. James, boys and girls, James means the one who follows.

The name James means the one who follows, which is a very apt and a very appropriate name for all of the Jameses mentioned in the New Testament. There are three.

I was thinking maybe there's four. Judas, the son of James, but we'll work on that one. There are three Jameses mentioned in the New Testament. And these three Jameses, they live up to their name because they are those who followed.

They are the ones who followed Jesus. There was, of course, the James who's not listed in this list of learners. He's James, the brother of Jesus.

Jesus had four brothers. He had James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas, or Jude, along with a number of sisters. And it was James, the brother of Jesus, who not only lived up to his name by following his brother Jesus, he also wrote the New Testament letter that we know as the letter of James.

[ 10 : 01 ] A letter which emphasizes the importance of following the example of his brother Jesus. Because James says in his letter that we're not just to be hearers of God's word, we're to be doers also.

Because faith without works is dead. Faith without works is dead. So there's that James. James, the brother of Jesus. But as you can see here, there are two Jameses among these twelve ordinary men.

There's James, whom we considered a number of weeks ago. He was the elder brother of John. And there's James, who we're considering this evening. James, the son of Alphaeus.

But what's interesting is that both Jameses, I don't know if Jameses is a word, but both Jameses in this list of learners, they're distinguished and they're differentiated in the New Testament by their father's name.

James, the brother of John, he was James, the son of Zebedee. And this James, as we read there, he was James, the son of Alphaeus.

[ 11 : 08 ] And of course, Zebedee and Alphaeus, they were their father's names. Because as sons, they were associated and they were attributed to their father. And as you know, that's something we do ourselves.

We do something similar. Because, you know, when we meet someone for the first time, I'm sure you do it all the time. When you meet someone for the first time and you try and work out who they are, one of the first questions you'll ask them is, well, where are you from?

And then you'll ask, well, who are you related to? And well, if you want to know a bit more, you ask, well, who are your people? And as you get older, you ask, and I'm finding myself doing this more and more with young people, you ask, who are your parents?

And it's by knowing their father or their mother's name that you realize and you recognize who they really are. In fact, I was visiting a house the other day. And while I was in, the phone rang.

And in order to explain to the person on the other end of the phone that it was me in visiting, they described me using my father's nickname. So boys and girls.

[ 12 : 16 ] And I was described on the phone as Murdo Slabby's son. That's who I am, Murdo Slabby's son. And it's a nickname that I've become accustomed to hearing. I'm Slabby's son or I'm Mac Slabby.

But that's what we do, don't we? We do it for everyone. You hear people talking about so-and-so and they call them, oh, that's Mac Noddy. Or that's Mac Toshi. That's what we do.

We depict and we describe people using their parents' name or their nickname. Or even their grandparents' name. And their grandparents' nickname. So to give you an example, this is an example I found in the phone book, the Barbers and Brew phone book.

And when I say who their father and grandfather is, or when I say the name that's in the phone book, you'll know who he is. He's Mac Hyorish Kanyich Arnal. So some of you know exactly who that is straight away.

Mac, if I'm pronouncing it correctly, Mac Hyorish Kanyich Arnal. So you'll know who it is because you'll know his father and you'll know his grandfather's name.

[ 13 : 20 ] And that's what we see with these two Jameses. They were distinguished. They were differentiated. They were separated because of their father's name. They were associated and attributed to their father.

One was James Mac Zebedee, the son of Zebedee. And the other was James Mac Alpheus. He's the son of Alpheus. But what's amazing about these two Jameses is that both Jameses had a brother.

They both had brothers. As we know, James, the son of Zebedee, had a younger brother called John. He's mentioned there in this list. He's James and John.

And together they were known and named together as Mac Zebedee. They were the sons of Zebedee. In fact, James and John, we said this before, James and John, they're known and named throughout the New Testament together because they worked together.

They were fishermen together. They came to faith together. They followed Jesus together. They fervently served in the kingdom together. James and John were this inseparable pairing of brothers.

[ 14 : 27 ] They were this famous and familiar duo. Because they were always together. So James, the son of Zebedee, his brother was John. But as we said, both Jameses had a brother.

James, the son of Alpheus' brother, although he's not mentioned alongside James in this list of learners, James, the son of Alpheus' brother, was Matthew, the once tax collector, come gospel writer.

Matthew was the brother of James, the son of Alpheus. It's a fascinating study when you work out who's who and where they're from.

So Matthew was the brother of James, the son of Alpheus. And we know this because in his gospel, Mark helpfully highlights that Matthew, who was nicknamed Levi, he was also the son of Alpheus.

So Mark, he says in his gospel, that Matthew, who was nicknamed Levi, he was also a son of Alphaeus. Therefore, we have to conclude that James, the son of Alphaeus, and Matthew, the son of Alphaeus, they're from the same home.

[ 15 : 44 ] They're from the same family. They were brothers. They were both Mac, Alphaeus, the son of Alphaeus. And you know, as we said when we were considering Matthew a few weeks ago, we said that Matthew had a nickname.

Matthew was Levi the Levite because he was a Levite. He was from the tribe of Levi. And as a Levite, Matthew would have been brought up to read the Torah. He would have been brought up to recite the Shema, which is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.

As a Jew, that's what they had to say both morning and evening, all their life. And Matthew would have had this wealth of knowledge, this wealth of Old Testament laws and prophecies and promises.

More than that, as a Levite, Matthew would have been destined for the Levitical priesthood. We even went as far as to say, if you remember, we went as far as to say that Matthew, or Levi the Levite, who was this brought up in a Christian home, he was a son of the manse.

Matthew was a son of the manse. And that growing up, Matthew would have been brought up with the Bible and with family worship and attending church. But so did his brother James.

[ 16 : 58 ] His brother James had exactly the same upbringing as Matthew. Because like Matthew, James was a son of Alphaeus. Like Matthew, James would have been brought up to read the Torah and to recite the Shema.

Like Matthew, James would have had all that wealth of knowledge of the Old Testament laws and prophecies and promises. And as a Levite, from the tribe of Levi, James, like his brother Matthew, they would have been destined for the Levitical priesthood.

In fact, James was also a son of the manse. He was brought up with the Bible, brought up with family worship, brought up to attend church, brought up around other people of the faith.

But like it is for every son or daughter of the manse and every child growing up in a Christian home with Christian parents, it's only grace that makes that head knowledge heart knowledge.

It is only grace that makes head knowledge heart knowledge. Matthew and James could have been brought up with it all and yet never know the truth in their heart.

[ 18 : 19 ] It's only grace that makes head knowledge heart knowledge. It's only grace that made James the son of Alphaeus, James the learner. That's what made him a disciple.

The grace of God in Jesus Christ. But what we see secondly is that James the son of Alphaeus was also James the lesser. He was James the learner and also James the lesser.

James the lesser. So our second heading this evening isn't so much as stating the obvious but stating the obscure. He's stating the obscure because as we said when it comes to James the son of Alphaeus there's nothing really written about him.

We don't know much about his Christian character his conduct or even his conversation. You could say that James the son of Alphaeus he was one of those unsung and unknown heroes in the Bible.

He was an unsung hero in the Bible. And as you know there are many unsung heroes and unsung heroines in the Bible and also in life. There are many of them in life.

[ 19 : 29 ] Many people many professions that go unnamed and unnoticed. They're not recognized they're not rewarded for their service they're not appreciated they're not even acknowledged for what they do and all that they do.

I think lockdown taught us that to recognize the people who often are unsung and unknown. There was the clap for carers every Thursday evening or clap for the NHS for they appreciated and acknowledged the doctors and the nurses and the carers and all those people the firefighters and the police officers and the soldiers and the farmers and the stay-at-home parents.

There were many unknown and unsung heroes and heroines in life. And there are many unknown and unsung heroes and heroines in the Bible. And James the son of Alphaeus was certainly one of them.

He was an unknown and unsung hero. And I say that because in comparison to the other James James the son of Zebedee James the son of Zebedee he was known in the early church as James the great or James the elder.

That's who James the son of Zebedee was known as. He was James the great or James the elder. James the son of Alphaeus he was he was the unknown guy. He was the unsung hero.

[ 20 : 59 ] He was the brother of Matthew and he was known as James the less. So you have James the great and James the less. James the larger and James the lesser. In fact it's Mark who describes James in this way in his gospel.

He describes James the son of Alphaeus as James the less. James the less. But when Mark referred to James the son of Alphaeus as James the less it's not clear actually what he meant by calling him the less.

Did he mean his age? Did he mean his appearance? Or did he mean his acclamation? The Greek word for less is mikros.

Mikros. It's where we get the word micro from. So it could refer to James' age where he was younger than James the elder. It could refer to James' appearance that he was shorter than James the elder.

He was smaller in stature. Or it could refer to James' acclamation that he was unknown. He was the unsung hero in comparison to James the great and James the elder and James the brother of John.

[ 22 : 14 ] Or Mark's reference could refer to all three of them. Calls him James the less because of his age, his appearance and his acclamation. Where James the son of Alphaeus, he was younger, he was smaller, he was unknown to everyone.

He was insignificant in comparison to this other James who was to the fore and to the front. He was unknown. This unknown and unsung hero.

And you know, that's what would have been the hard thing about having two disciples with the same name. We'll see that later on. There's another, there's two Judases in this list of learners. But that's the hard thing about having two disciples with the same name.

Immediately, you start making comparisons. Maybe there was even a competition between the two Jameses. Especially because James, we'll call him James the larger, the elder, James the great.

James the larger, he held this more prominent position. He was always to the fore. He was to the front much more than James the lesser. He was in the background. He was unknown and unsung.

[ 23 : 20 ] James the larger, we're told he was closer to Christ. What a claim to have. He was part of that intimate and inner trio.

You remember them? The three whom Jesus always took with him. Peter, James, and John. He was part of that inner trio. He was intimate with Jesus.

He was closer to Christ. Maybe much more closer than James the lesser. More than that, James the larger, he was Mac Zebedee. He was the son of Zebedee.

He was a son of a wealthy business owner. A son of a man who had this great fishing business and a fishing trade in Israel. Everybody knew Zebedee.

Everybody knew Mac Zebedee because he was the son of this great man, Zebedee. He was well known in the community. James the lesser didn't really, nobody really knew him.

[ 24 : 18 ] James the larger, he was also the older brother of John. John's the gospel writer. John is the disciple whom Jesus loved. John is the one who was there at the cross when everybody else disappeared and deserted Jesus.

James could say, that was my brother. That's my brother. James the larger, he was also one of the Boanerges's brothers. He was one of the sons of thunder. He had this fierce and fiery character full of passion for the Lord and passion for the lost while James the lesser was the quiet one in the background.

You can see the comparisons. You can see that there might have been competition. You can see that James the larger was probably louder and larger than James the lesser because James the lesser, he wasn't part of the intimate trio.

He wasn't as close to Christ as James the larger. He didn't have this prominent and powerful father in the fishing industry. We don't even know what James, the son of Alphaeus, his father did.

We don't know who Alphaeus was. He also had a brother, though, who wrote a gospel. James' brother, wrote Matthew, but yet he was overshadowed by his brother.

[ 25 : 38 ] It's obvious that this obscure disciple, he lived in the shadow of his brother. James, the son of Alphaeus, not as popular as Matthew, his older brother.

Needless to say, James the lesser, James the lesser, he was the kind of disciple who was reserved. He was reticent. He was in the background. He was the shy and silent type.

And yet, you know, I love this man. I love James the lesser. Why do I love him? Because he's one of the unknowns. He's one of the unsung heroes of church history.

There's nothing written about him. There's nothing recorded about him. We don't have anything that he said. We don't have any questions that he asked. We don't hear that he's written a gospel.

He didn't have a book of the Bible named after him. He wasn't given a prominent position in the church. He didn't have letters after his name. He wasn't famous. He wasn't even familiar. If anything, you could probably say that this James was forgotten.

[ 26 : 44 ] He was completely forgotten. And yet, what I love about James, the son of Alphaeus, is that he faithfully served his Savior in the background. He faithfully served his Savior in the background.

He wasn't to the fore. He wasn't to the front. He was one of the unknowns. One of the unsung heroes of church history. And what I love about him is that he wasn't the only one.

There were many of them. There were many of them. There are many names of men and women mentioned in the Bible whom we know little or nothing about.

You look at all these letters of Paul. He comes to the end of his letters. He's thanking all these men and all these women and he's naming them and we know little or nothing about them. Even you go through church history, there are so many people who are influential.

So many people and yet they're not mentioned. We don't know them. They're not mentioned. In the Bible, we know little or nothing about them. But yet, what can be said about every single one of these disciples is that they faithfully served their Savior wherever he sent them.

[ 28 : 02 ] They faithfully served their Savior wherever he sent them. And even though they're not remembered, even though they're not recognized, even though they're not rewarded in this world, they are remembered in the next, they are recognized in the next, and they are rewarded in the next.

Their reward was not with man. Their reward was in heaven. They carried their cross in this life and they received their crown in glory.

And you know, my friend, that's all that's asked of us. That's all that's asked of us in this life as disciples of Jesus. We are not chosen, called, and commissioned to make a name for ourselves and to give ourselves this prominent position where everybody sees us and everybody loves us so that we're remembered and receive this recognition and rewards in life.

No, we are chosen, called, and commissioned to faithfully serve our Savior wherever He sends us. We are chosen, called, and commissioned to faithfully serve our Savior wherever He sends us.

And so He sent you to this community. However you ended up here in Providence, you are here and you have been chosen, called, and commissioned to faithfully serve your Savior in this community.

[ 29 : 39 ] And you don't have to do it to the fore and to the front. No, no, just like James, the son of Alphaeus. You do it in the background. Faithfully serving your Savior to His glory.

And you know, although there's little written about James, the son of Alphaeus, we can actually learn a lot from his experience and his example. He was James, the learner, and he was James, the lesser.

James, the learner, and James, the lesser. And you know, when I think of James, the lesser, I think of what John the Baptist said. He must increase and I must decrease.

And that's what James, the lesser, did. He decreased. He was to the background, faithfully serving his Savior wherever he sent him.

But you know, I want to conclude this evening with this quote that I read about James the less or James the lesser. And this is what he wrote.

[ 30 : 48 ] The lack of information about James, the son of Alphaeus, is a lesson in itself. The lack of information about James, the son of Alphaeus, is a lesson in itself.

Because James the less was as much an apostle as Peter and John. He is not considered James the less in heaven because he was faithful to his earthly calling.

He will sit, as the Bible tells us in Revelation, he will sit on one of the 24 thrones in heaven clothed in white robes with a golden crown upon his head.

Therefore, James ought to be an encouragement to us because few will ever know our names. Some of us will toil for decades in remote regions of the world with little or nothing to show for it.

Others will serve quietly in their homes and families and neighborhoods and workplaces. And most of it will go unnoticed by others.

[ 31 : 56 ] But he says, God notices. God notices just like he noticed James, the son of Alphaeus.

So let's be like James, the son of Alphaeus, where he must increase and we must decrease for his glory. May the Lord bless these thoughts to us.



Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, may we give thanks to thee for reminding us this evening that there are unknown and unsung heroes in the Bible and they point us to the reality that Jesus must always increase and that we must decrease, that he must have all the glory and that we would plead for blessing, that Christ would ultimately have the preeminence and that we would know the hand of the Lord upon us for good.

Lord, bless us as a people even as we go into a new week, that we would go into it humbly, realizing that we have a wonderful Savior, a Savior who leads us, a Savior who guides us, a Savior who keeps us and one who has promised us that he will go with us into this week, that whatever this week has for us, that he is with us every step of the way, for that is the promise of our Shepherd, that goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life and that in God's house forevermore our dwelling place shall be.

Help us to carry our cross in order to receive the crown, the crown of life. Go before us, we pray, keep us, we ask, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake.

[ 33 : 44 ] Amen. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening. We're going to sing in Psalm 90. Psalm 90 in the Scottish Psalter.

Psalm 90, it's on page 350. Psalm 90, we're singing from verse 10 down to the end of the double verse mark 12.

Psalm 90 at verse 10, page 350. But before we sing, I have my three questions for the young and the not so young.

Question one, what does the name James mean? That's the first part. The one who follows, yeah. How many are in the New Testament? Three. Job. What is my father's nickname?

Slabby. You'll hate me for saying that. Question three, what or who was James, the son of Alphaeus' brother? Matthew.

[ 34 : 58 ] James, the son of Alphaeus' brother, was Matthew. Well done. Well done for listening. The adults were very quiet tonight. They obviously didn't know the answers. So we're singing Psalm 90 at verse 10.

This is the prayer of Moses. As Moses has reflected upon his life, he realizes not only that life is short, but also that he needs to keep learning wisdom and to gain wisdom from God's truth that he may live according to it.

That's what he says at the end of verse 12. Psalm 90 at verse 10. Three score and ten years do sum up. Our days and years we see. Or if by reason of more strength than some four score they be, yet doth the strength of such old men but grief and labor prove, for it is soon cut off and we fly hence and soon remove.

Down to the end of the double verse, Mark 12 of Psalm 90 to God's praise. Three score and ten years do sum up our days and years we see.

For if by reason of more strength in some four score they be, yet doth the strength of such old men but grief and labor prove, for it is soon cut off and we cry hence and soon remove.

[ 37 : 03 ] Who knows the power of thy wrath according according to thy fear.

So is thy wrath, Lord, teach thou us our end in mind to bear.

And so to count our days that we our hearts may still apply to learn thy wisdom and thy truth that we may live thereby.

the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore.

Amen.