

Encounter with Jesus – James and John

In these services we are looking at people who have had an encounter with Jesus and the effect the encounter had on them. We have looked at several people who met Jesus physically during his ministry, through others after his death and in the Old Testament. Last time we looked at Peter. Tonight we are looking at James and John's Encounters with Jesus. Hilary is going to read us the first part of their story. [Mk 1:16-20](#)

Who were James and John?

We are told they were fishermen, sons of Zebedee, and Luke tells us they were partners to Peter and Andrew. A few people in Jewish Palestine were rich; most were relatively poor. Some, like fishermen, tended to fall between the rich and the poor. James and John were clearly not poor—they had “hired men”, as only well-off people did. So this text indicates that none of these disciples left their business behind because it was going badly; they left behind well-paying jobs. Also many Jewish teachers in Jesus' day felt that the greatest commandment was to honour one's parents. To abruptly leave behind one's family and the family business was a great sacrifice that went against everything the culture taught.

How did they encounter Jesus?

Jesus calls them directly to follow him. They respond immediately, so Jesus must have had a big impact on them, or they may have seen him preaching in the area before and wanted to follow him. Disciples usually sought out their own teachers. Because discipleship often involved temporarily laying aside your livelihood and being apart from your wife and children, the decision to choose a teacher would normally have been made only after much deliberation, especially when the teacher travelled from place to place instead of staying in one town to teach. James and John became 2 of the 3 closest disciples to Jesus during his 3 year ministry, his inner circle, and were present at most of his sermons and miracles.

What happened during the encounters?

There are numerous mentions of Peter, James and John being with Jesus in the gospels. I have chosen 3 to read to look at different aspects of James and John's experiences and characters.

1. [Mk 9:2-10](#). They were present at the transfiguration. God had revealed his glory to Moses on Mount Sinai, so that Moses had come down from the mountain reflecting God's glory in his face. Here the glory of Jesus, who is greater than Moses and Elijah, is revealed on the mountain; he is therefore shown as the ultimate spokesperson for God. Jewish literature often described angels and other heavenly beings as being clothed in white. Elijah reportedly never died but was taken up to heaven; Moses was buried by God himself. These two figures were both expected to return in some sense before the time of the end, so Peter, James and John would have been aware of the significance of the event, as Peter's somewhat impractical suggestion of erecting shelters on the mountain indicates. The heavenly voice from the cloud repeats the basic message given at Jesus' Baptism, but may add another biblical allusion. “Listen to him” may refer to [Deu 18:15](#), where the Israelites are warned to heed the “prophet like Moses,” the new Moses who would come.

2. [Mk 10:35-45](#). They misunderstood what Jesus glory was like and wanted to be honoured as viceroys in an earthly kingdom; this desire reflects a popular misconception of the Messiah and God's kingdom at the time of an earthly king who would defeat the Romans and restore the kingdom of Israel, one that Jesus repeatedly repudiated. This was despite this passage following straight on from Jesus telling the disciples he would be mocked, flogged and killed in Jerusalem. Jesus elsewhere refers to the cross as his cup, which may mean the cup of judgment that appears often in the Old Testament. The positions on either side of a king's throne (especially the right side) were the most prestigious in a kingdom, so Jesus may be alluding to heaven or possibly to those crucified on his right and his left. James was later the

first of the twelve to be martyred, but according to church tradition John lived into the late first century. When the other disciples become indignant with James & John for asking (although it might have been because they wanted those positions themselves), Jesus tells them his kingdom is different. It was radical for Jesus to define greatness in terms of servanthood; despite Jewish rules requiring that slaves be well treated, Jewish free persons, like their Gentile counterparts, considered slaves socially inferior. By calling himself a “servant” and defining his mission as “giving his life a ransom for the many,” Jesus identifies himself with the suffering servant of [Isa 53:10-12](#). Although the servant’s mission had been given to Israel as a whole, Israel through disobedience could not fulfil it, so that the one who would fulfil it had to restore Israel as well as bring light to the Gentiles. Because hardly anyone else had yet applied this passage to the Messiah, Jesus is trying to redefine their expectation about his messianic mission.

3. [Lk 9:51-56](#). They misunderstood how to bring about the kingdom. The passage suggests that Jesus sought accommodation in the village (as they were taking the short route to Jerusalem through Samaria rather than down the Jordan valley). This would have offended many pious Pharisees and most Jewish nationalists. Even before John Hyrcanus, a Jewish king, had destroyed the Samaritan temple in the second century B.C., Samaritans and Jews had detested one another’s holy sites. Samaritans later tried to defile the Jerusalem temple. They were also known to heckle pilgrims to Jerusalem, a practice that occasionally led to violence. When the Samaritans refused to host them because they were going to Jerusalem, James and John want to call down fire from heaven as Elijah had done on the altar on Mount Carmel and when two companies of troops came against him, rather than showing love and grace. Jesus rebukes them because his first coming was about giving everyone the chance of salvation, judgement will come when he returns the second time.

There are many more mentions of James & John in the gospels, Acts and epistles. They went on with Jesus to Jerusalem; they prepared and ate the last supper with him; he asked them to watch with him as he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane; they abandoned him when the crowd came to arrest him; John at least was at the crucifixion and Jesus told him to take care of Mary; John ran with Peter and saw the empty tomb; both of them saw the risen Jesus in the upper room; they received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost with the other disciples; John is with Peter when the man crippled from birth was healed at the temple and faced the Sanhedrin with him.

What effect did the encounters have on James and John?

Both became leaders of the early church in Jerusalem, they were changed from frightened men who had run away in the garden and had locked themselves away in the upper room for fear of the Jews to bold proclaimers of the gospel. James became the first of the 12 disciples to be martyred, by Herod. Christian tradition holds that John outlived the remaining apostles and that he was the only one to die of natural causes. It is commonly believed that John is the author of the [Gospel of John](#) and four other books of the New Testament — the three [Epistles of John](#) and the [Book of Revelation](#). John is considered to have been exiled to [Patmos](#), during the persecutions under Emperor [Domitian](#) (AD 81 to 96). Banishment was a common punishment used during the Imperial period for a number of offenses. Revelation 1:9 says that the author wrote the book on Patmos. He therefore had great influence on the early church and on us today.

Discussion – There are some questions for us here which I would like you to discuss in your groups and we’ll then have a short feedback from each group:

Have you been “called” to be a disciple? Would you be prepared to give up everything to follow Jesus?

James & John had seen Jesus perform miracles and had heard his teaching first hand, but they still had pre-conceptions that stopped them doing things Jesus’ way. What pre-conceptions / cultural values / traditions stop us doing things Jesus’ way?