

# Two Missions: Part 5: James and John

Steve Thompson

Lesson 116

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# Two Missions: Petrine and Pauline

- There was a *feud* in early Christianity between the Jerusalem Church, lead by Peter, James, and John (PJ&J), and the mission led by Paul over Jewish ceremonial laws such as circumcision
- The feud and its influence can be observed in four places:
  - (1) in the *epistles of Paul*: explicitly in Galatians, and by implicit references in his other epistles
  - (2) in the *Synoptic gospels*, by observing what Mark writes, then seeing how Matthew and Luke change what Mark wrote
  - (3) in the book of *Acts*, where Luke plays down the bitterness of the feud compared to Paul's earlier writings
  - (4) the *Gospel of John*
- Note: The material in this lesson comes from St. Paul vs St. Peter: A Tale of Two Missions by Michael Goulder

# Agenda

- We will look at a few examples of how Paul selectively appears agreeable when he can, yet becomes quite belligerent when his back is to the wall in his battle against PJ&J
- We would examine the other side in the same way, except they left no writings
- We will examine how the debate between the two missions affected the gospel writers' treatment of 'the sons of Zebedee', namely James and John (the J&J of PJ&J)
  - The way each gospel writer handled James and John reveals his sympathies in the debate between the two missions
- PJ&J stands for 'Peter, James, and John'

# Paul's Treatment of his Foes

- Goulder writes: “When things were going his way, Paul could speak kindly of the pillars”, as he does in I Cor 1:12-16
  - The ‘pillars’ are PJ&J
- Goulder further says that Paul is concerned about Peter’s reputation as “the rock”, and so in I Cor 3 he claims that the *only* valid foundation is Jesus Christ
  - A sly way to displace the rock!
  - I Cor 9:1-2 is an example of the *emphatic negative*, in which Paul defends himself against the apparent charge that he was not a disciple of Jesus

# Paul's Treatment of his Foes

- Goulder writes that *Paul can be quite nasty and sarcastic* when Peter gets the upper hand
  - A prime example is the book of Galatians, as we have seen
  - In II Cor 11:5, 12:11 Paul sarcastically calls PJ&J ‘superlative apostles’, after referring to the false gospel they proclaim in 11:1-4 and describing his heavenly revelation in 12
  - In II Cor 11:13 Paul writes “For such men are *false apostles*, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ”
    - Harsh words for the closest disciples of Jesus!
  - In Philippians 3:2, Paul refers to them as “dogs” who “mutilate the flesh” (circumcision)

# The Loyalty Test

- Goulder applies the loyalty test to James and John
- This case is more complicated than that of the family of Jesus we looked at earlier, since Mark has both favorable and unfavorable passages concerning James and John
  - Thus we will need to examine the writing of Mark even more carefully *to see on what issues he degrades James and John*, while respecting them on other issues
- Mark portrays James and John (and Peter) *favorably* in six places
- Mark portrays James and John *unfavorably* in two stories, both longer and more notable than the honorable mention cases
  - Goulder makes the point that *Peter*, who is less hostile to Paul than James and John, is *not mentioned in these two stories*

# James and John, per Mark

- Mark portrays James and John (and Peter) *favorably* in six places
  - They are among the first to be called as disciples
  - They courageously respond to the call to be disciples
  - They are taken by Jesus to the raising of Jairus' daughter
  - They alone are allowed to see the transfiguration of Jesus
  - They are among the few given secrets of things to come
  - They alone are asked by Jesus to pray in Gethsemane
- My observation: in most of these cases, James and John are merely observers or passive recipients, not active doers
- They take a more active role in the two stories where they are portrayed negatively

# James and John, per Mark

- Mark portrays James and John (and Peter) *unfavorably* in Mark 10:35 where, in Goulder's words, they are portrayed as overly ambitious and unspiritual by asking to sit on either side of Jesus in heaven
  - To me this is particularly bad because they make this request just as Jesus has told his disciples that he is to be handed over, mocked, scourged, and killed
    - It does tie in with Jesus saying he will rise, but still is a terrible time to be asking for favors!
  - Jesus rebuffs their request, saying the honor will be for those for whom it is prepared, which hints that this honor is intended for others; in particular, it is for those who “drink the cup”, which I take to mean those who have suffered for the sake of Jesus, and I suspect Mark is thinking of Paul

# James and John, per Mark

- Mark 10:35 (continued)
  - Finally Jesus says that rulers should *not exercise authority* over their people (Mark 10:42-44)
  - Mark 10:43: “whoever would be great among you must be your servant”
    - Does this refer to James and John? They had asked to be made great by sitting on either side of Jesus!
  - This passage, which denies *authority to James and John* ties in very well with the issue Paul had against PJ&J, which was that *PJ&J were trying to exercise authority over Paul’s churches*
    - They wanted Gentile Christians to obey Jewish laws

# James and John, per Mark

- The second story that portrays John in a bad light is Mark 9:33-50
  - Goulder speculates that James is not in this story because he died before the feud climaxed
- In Mark 9:33-50
  - Jesus asks them what they were discussing on the road, for they had been discussing who was the greatest; they are silent
  - Jesus then says those who would be first (he knew what they were talking about!) should be last and should serve
  - Jesus says “whoever receives one such child in my name receives me”
  - Jesus then forbids John from stopping a man casting out demons in Jesus’ name (exorcism) and says that “he who is not against us is for us”

# James and John, per Mark

- Jesus says “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea”
- What do this passage from Mark 9:33-50 mean?
  - Who are the little ones?
  - Who is causing them to sin?
  - How are they making the little ones to sin?
- The little ones are Gentile Christians
- It is the leaders of the Jerusalem church, PJ&J and their successors, who are making them sin
- They are making them sin by forcing a false gospel upon them because the gospel they preach is based on the law and thus nullifies the idea of salvation through the crucifixion

# James and John, per Mark

- What do these passages from Mark 9:33-50 say about the Jerusalem church leaders?
  - In the passage “whoever receives one such child in my name receives me”, the child refers to Gentile Christians
    - Gentile Christian leaders *are* doing the work of Jesus!
    - A *rebuke* to the idea that Gentile Christians need to do more to become “adult Christians” *by obeying Jewish laws*
  - The passage “he who is not against us is for us”, which starts with *Jesus stopping John*, says that John should not stop others from working in the name of Jesus (such as Paul) and that people (like Paul) who are not against us are for us
    - *John was wrong to try to stop Paul from leading the Gentile churches the way he did*

# James and John, per Mark

- “Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung round his neck and he were thrown into the sea” *goes a step further*
  - Says that those people (leaders of the Jerusalem church) who cause Gentile Christians to sin (by insisting on circumcision and thus compelling them to believe in *another gospel* as Paul would say) should be thrown into the sea
  - Remember how Paul desired to have his opponents *mutilate themselves*? Doesn't this sound like the same thing?
    - It is! Now it is written by Mark *as being the words of Jesus*, and it is motivated by his (Mark's) animosity toward the Jerusalem church leadership in his own time!

# James and John, per Mark

- Mark thus sides with Paul by writing that
  - Jesus denied the authority that James and John requested
  - Jesus rebuked their request to be the greatest (sitting next to Jesus)
  - He said those who are for him are not against him (Paul is for Jesus, so PJ&J are wrong to oppose Paul)
  - Those who make little ones to sin should be cast into the sea
- Goulder puts it very succinctly: “Jerusalem Christians who were forever boasting that their authority derived from the Three had to be put severely in their place. James and John had been a pair of classic authoritarians, and Jesus had said as much, and warned them that they were on the way to hell for it.” (p.14)

# Summary

- Paul wrote in his epistles of his opposition to the Jerusalem church leadership
  - He opposed their attempt to compel Gentile Christians to obey Jewish laws and said they should mutilate themselves
  - Paul repeatedly claims to be an apostle of Jesus equal to those who knew Jesus personally
- *Decades later Mark addresses the same issues in a more subtle way by writing stories about Jesus*
  - He has Jesus say things about James and John that undermine their authority
  - He has Jesus say things that support the idea that “baby” (i.e. Gentile) Christians are indeed Christian
  - *Mark thus echoes Paul’s arguments, but does so by putting words into the mouth of Jesus*

# The Feud Continues

- Same Battle, Different Generation, Different Method
  - *Paul wrote in his epistles* of his opposition to the Jerusalem church leadership
  - Decades later Mark fights the same fight by *inserting certain stories in his gospel*
    - Except now Mark battles the current leadership of the Jerusalem church, who are successors of PJ&J
    - He does so by *undermining their heroes and predecessors*, and the people from whom they supposedly got their authority: PJ&J!
    - Mark undermines them by putting words into the mouth of Jesus that are unfavorable to James and John
  - *So the fight is the same, but the target has shifted to a new generation, and the method of attack is different*

# The Feud Continues

- Same Battle, Different Generation, Different Method
  - Matthew and Luke enter the foray by using Mark as the primary source for each of their gospels, meaning *that they have to decide what to do with passages in Mark relevant to this feud*
    - From the way they alter Mark's stories, we can see where they are relative to the two opposing camps
  - Luke then gets even more involved *by writing the book of Acts* because he writes about the events that happened to PJ&J and Paul
    - We thus get additional *insight into where Luke stands by comparing what Luke says about an event that Paul has described*

# The Loyalty Test

- We thus have seen several more examples where Mark sides with Paul in Goulder's loyalty test
- At the start of this lesson, I had a slide with the following:
- The feud and its influence can be observed in four places:
  - (1) in the *epistles of Paul*: explicitly in Galatians, and by implicit references in his other epistles
  - (2) in the *Synoptic gospels*, by observing what Mark writes, then seeing how Matthew and Luke change what Mark wrote
  - (3) in the book of *Acts*, where Luke plays down the bitterness of the feud compared to Paul's earlier writings
  - (4) the *Gospel of John*
- We have now seen some examples of (1) and (2)
- We will see some of (3) and (4) next lesson