



Links Players

JAMES, SON OF ALPHEAUS - SERVING IN OBSCURITY

These are the names of the twelve apostles: ...James, son of Alphaeus. (Matthew 10:3, NIV)

If we were playing Jeopardy and the “Answer” was “Keiser, Wood, and Picard,” we would have to scratch our heads a bit to come up with the question: “Who are golfers that won the Masters in the 1930s and 1940s?”

These professional golfers are men whose names are etched in the record books but whose names are rarely spoken. Except for golf “wonks,” these Masters’ champions are largely unknown.

One of Jesus’ twelve apostles was named “James, son of Alphaeus.” In the entirety of the Bible, he is mentioned only a handful of times—each time in a list of the other apostles (Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13).

We know his name is James and that he was the son of Alphaeus. That is all we know about him. We are not told anything about what he might have done that stands out from the rest of the apostles or whether he displayed outstanding leadership among them.

We do not know where he went after Jesus’ ascension or how he died. He went about his work without drawing attention to himself. He is distinguished only by his obscurity.

While some apostles authored books of the Bible and others are featured regularly in the gospels, James was quietly faithful to Jesus. For that, he will be equally honored with them for all of eternity. He will sit on a throne near Jesus to judge the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28) with as much authority and honor as the other apostles. His name will be engraved on the foundation of the walls of the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:14).

For those of us who work in the shadows and out of the limelight of the Kingdom, we can find encouragement in James as an example of those who quietly go about their work and are soon forgotten despite their significant efforts and accomplishments.

You know these folks---they are the ones who usually show up to help when there is a job to be done, or someone is in need. They do this without asking for anything in return. They do not seek recognition or appreciation for their work. In short, they are humble, inconspicuous ordinary folks.

Some toil for decades in remote regions of the earth with little to show for it. Others serve quietly in their homes or neighborhoods and then die relatively unnoticed. There will be no parades or newspaper or internet headlines praising their efforts.

My pride and sinful nature sometimes crave earthly recognition for what I think I am doing to further God’s Kingdom. In the words of Roberto De Vicenzo: “What a stupid I am.” James is a bold reminder that my heart and motives must be pure and “God-centered,” not “Me-centered.”

As we go about our service here on earth, we need to keep in mind, even though we are unlikely to end up as a trivia answer, that we will be honored by our Father in Heaven because he will not forget what we have done in service to his Kingdom.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that: God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them. (Hebrews 6:10). Our faithful, patient and humble service may go unnoticed and unrecorded by men, but it never goes unnoticed by the Lord.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help us be content with serving you even though our work is often inconspicuous and unrecognized.

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Mark “Ole” Olson

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