

The Hotheads

The Master Disciple Maker – Part V

Selected Scripture

Introduction

Today, we will continue our study on the lives of the disciples and the way Jesus Christ, the Master Disciple Maker, impacted them by calling them.

There is an epidemic sweeping our country. We often hear of the diseases that sweep through, but this is an epidemic of hostility; of unrestrained anger. It is an epidemic that causes people to lash out; to fight.

We have all seen or heard of this epidemic. I recently read an article about hostility on the highway. It told of some motorists who were pulled from their car and beaten by other motorists who were angry. Another article that I read some time ago, told of a man who was shot by another motorist because he got his parking spot.

It is amazing to me the epidemic that is confronting us today that we call hostility; that we call anger. It is interesting, as well, that in this study of the disciples, I have discovered that the one characteristic; the one quality that is shared by most of the disciples that Christ called to Himself, is the quality of anger. The one characteristic that is shared in the personalities of these men, more than any other quality, is hostility or anger shown toward people.

Today, we will discuss three characteristics that are companions or relatives to hostility. These three seem to accompany the quality of anger; of lashing out. We will then, look at several of the disciples and the way they manifested these characteristics. We will also look at Christ's dealings with these disciples and the way they were changed as a result.

Three Companions to Hostility

Let us take a look at three characteristics that are companions to hostility.

1. The first cousin to anger or hostility is the characteristic that we will call insensitivity.

Look at Luke 9:51-52, which is speaking of Jesus.

When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem; and He sent messengers on

ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him.

The Samaritans were half-breeds who not only hated the Jews, but were hated by the Jews. Continue to Luke 9:53-54, which will speak of two of the disciples that we will discuss today, James and John.

But they [Samaritans] did not receive Him, because He was journeying with His face toward Jerusalem. When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

In other words, "Lord, these people are rejecting You. We can't stand for that. Let's just smoke them off of planet earth."

Now this may be better understood by looking back to the time when Jesus sees James and John and calls them to Himself. In Mark 3:17, Jesus says, "Oh, you're James and John. I now call you,"

. . . Boanerges, which means, "Sons of Thunder" . . .

Jesus did not know anything about them, but because He was who He was, He could see into their lives; into their personalities; into their characters and know that these men seethed with passion. James and John were consumed with hostility that would eventually, if not ultimately, hurt His program. This did not dismiss them from qualifying as disciples, however. Jesus said, "Oh, I know who you are. You men are the 'Sons of Thunder'."

James and John were vocal, passionate, and perhaps, insensitive with the Samaritans, as we see in these verses. They say, "Lord, they don't buy what we're telling them. Let's clear planet earth of these Samaritans."

Jesus' response to the insensitivity of James and John toward the Samaritans is interesting. Look at Luke 9:55.

But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you

are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.'] And they went on to another village.

There is a danger in having the wrong spirit in ministry. James and John had zeal without sensitivity. They were probably trying to align their ministry with that of Elijah, basically saying, in the spirit of Elijah, "Let's call down fire on all those who stand against God."

This sounds good. There are people in ministry who are so consumed with their ministry that it does not matter who is involved or what happens to them. They may lose their heads, and these people would say, "Fine, as long as we accomplish our objective."

You may work for a man or a woman whose passion is to build their business. It does not matter to them if you lose your head in the process. They simply say, "We're going to build this thing."

This happens in the church, as well. It is the result of insensitivity; a zeal, a passion without caring for people.

I read a story in one of John MacArthur's commentaries on Matthew about this problem. It was of a Norwegian pastor by the name of Henry Gibson whose motto for life was, "All or nothing!"

"All or nothing!" sounds good, does it not? It sounds like conviction and indeed, this pastor was convicted. The only problem was, sometimes the word "all" meant people.

The story told that Gibson's young daughter fell ill and was, in fact, about to die. The Norwegian doctor said to him, "If you don't take her out of this kind of climate, she will die."

Henry gave the doctor a sermon on "All or nothing!" and his daughter died.

Gibson's grief-stricken, love-starved wife would take the little girls clothes and sit in a rocker and fold them and unfold them and fold them and unfold them. Henry discovered this and took the clothes from her and gave them away. He then, gave her a speech on "All or nothing!"

Gibson's wife also died, several months later, of grief. This man cared little for the most important people in his life because they stood in the way of his "All or nothing!" passion.

"James and John, you've got a mission, right?"

"Right."

"The Samaritans are in the way."

"Good! Let's call down fire and wipe them off of the face of the earth."

How did Jesus handle this insensitivity on the part of James and John? We are told in these verses that He just went on to another village.

However, later, where did Jesus go; what town did He stir up? Samaria. It all started with a woman at the well on whom He had compassion.

Jesus would also show tremendous sensitivity as He Himself, though He was God and His disciples knew it, would bow His back to the whip and be hung on a cross. He would then say the most sensitive thing any person could ever say,

. . . "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." . . . (Luke 23:34a)

Have you ever said that? You will have to in life because, like James and John, you will go through similar situations and have but two ways to respond – sensitively or insensitively.

2. The second companion to anger or hostility is the characteristic that we will call ambition.

I say this because when the curtain is pulled back on an angry person's life, a frustrated person with unmet ambition is discovered. This person has an agenda that they want to see done, and it has not been done. This may create anger or hostility.

James and John fully expected prominence in the kingdom. This was their ambition and there was no doubt about it. These two disciples had visions of grandeur. They were going to rule and reign with Christ in the coming kingdom. So, let us turn to the book of Matthew to find out what happens. Look at Matthew 20:20-21.

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Jesus with her sons, bowing down and making a request of Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in Your kingdom these two sons of mine may sit one on Your right and one on Your left."

In other words, "Give my sons the places of prominence."

Continue to Matthew 20:22 where we find Jesus' response to this. I believe He turned and looked at James and John as He answered.

But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?” They said to Him, “We are able.”

I love this response that is so typical of passionate, ambitious people. James and John do not even know what the cup is! Yet, they are saying, “We’ll drink it. Where is it?”

This would be like asking one of my five year old sons after church, “Would you like to drive home today? Are you able?”

What would you expect him to say?

“I am able, Dad. Give me the keys.”

The problem, of course, is that James and John did not really know what the cup involved. For them, by the way, it involved two completely different things.

James, as we will see in a moment, was martyred. He was one of the early leaders; a passionate, out-front man. He would lose his life in a flame of glory.

What about John? He would live longer than any other disciple. We know he was exiled for a while, but he eventually returned to Ephesus where he lived out the rest of his life discipling men for ministry. He would live to nearly one hundred years of age.

“What cup do You have, Lord, for James?”

“One that James would love; that fits him well – to go out in a blaze of glory.”

“What about John, Lord?”

“He’s a Son of Thunder. I’ll give him a cup that’s just as difficult to drink. It’s living a long life, facing the frustrations of the flesh, overcoming the devices of Satan day in and day out, week in and week out.”

Some of us would make wonderful martyrs. We are just wired that way. We would say, “Show me the pyre, Lord, I’ll stand and light it.”

However, how many of us make good disciples? How many of us are able to drink the cup that lasts a lifetime.

This would be the lot of these two men. God would, in a sense, rewrite their ambitions to let them in on that fact.

I read about an interesting Roman coin that was discovered in an archaeological dig. On the coin was a picture of an ox. The ox was facing two things – a picture of an altar and a drawing of a plow.

Underneath the picture, an inscription read, loosely translated, “Ready to accept either one.”

This, ladies and gentlemen, is up to God to decide. However, drinking the cup that He has given you – with its frustrations and its difficulties – is discipleship. This kind of discipleship has no room for ambition and personal agenda.

3. A third relative to anger or hostility is resentment.

Let me introduce the third of our trilogy of hotheads, and that is, Simon the Zealot. Matthew 10:4 tells us all we have on this man,

[the names of the . . . apostles are . . .] Simon the Zealot . . .

This verse only gives his name, but it tells a volume. “Simon the Zealot” identifies him with a party in Judaism known as “Zealots”. The Hebrew word is “qana,” which means, “jealous for the law”. These men were red hot patriots. They were men who were determined that Judaism would flourish and rule. They resented Roman rule and were going to unshackle Rome’s chains about the Jewish nation. They would do this any way they could. The Zealots would murder; they would plunder; they would engage in guerrilla warfare; they would use any tactics possible to overthrow Rome.

In New Testament times, we know that the Zealots were led by a man named Judas the Galilean. The Romans finally captured him and killed him. Afterwards, the Zealots went even deeper underground and their guerrilla warfare continued with greater treachery.

After a period of time, the Zealots were led by another man by the name of Eleazar. They were helped this time because they had discovered a hilltop hideout known as Masada. I am sure many of you have heard about Masada, which is a long story in itself. However, as the Roman army advanced and was about to conquer this stronghold, Eleazar called together nearly a thousand of these patriots on that hilltop. He gave them a flaming speech, telling them that it would be better to die by their own hand than to die as a slave or captive to the Roman army. Nine hundred forty six people believed it. The husbands took the lives of their children and their wives and then, took their own lives. The only way we know the story is that when the Roman army reached the crest of that cliff, they found two very frightened women

and five children who had hidden in a cave, not wanting to die.

The group continued, even after the Masada incident. They would murder, plunder, loot, or do whatever was needed for their cause. This is a Zealot.

Now Jesus is calling His disciples, and who does He choose? Simon – one of the Zealots!

We can just imagine, “Lord, I want a word with You. My name is Matthew. You know me – I’m the Publican; I’m the turncoat. I sold out to the Roman government so I could take taxes from the Jews. I won’t live a day if You call that man; that Zealot.”

If we had been there, we would probably have sidled up to Jesus and said, “Look, Lord, don’t You understand? That man is a risk. He is a powder keg – waiting to be ignited.”

Jesus would say, “No, Simon the Zealot will follow Me.”

What did Jesus do to Simon? Let us put the clues together.

One thing we know is that He made Simon live with Matthew for three and a half years. Simon ate with Matthew, probably shared the same mat when they went on missionary trips, prayed with him. Jesus introduced Simon to another type of man.

Jesus would also teach and re-teach Simon.

Most importantly, Jesus would love him.

Jesus would refocus Simon’s resentment toward Roman rule; his passion against the Roman army to a passion for a lost world. He would set aside Simon’s Zionistic tendency to see Judaism flourish and tell him of another kingdom to come, “Another will come, Simon, not one that is for now. It will only happen when I, the Leader, allow a Roman soldier to beat Me, and allow a Roman sword to pierce Me, and allow a Roman cross to impale me. That is the way this kingdom is going to be ushered in.”

Three Hotheads Transformed

What happened to these three men; to these three disciples, James and John and Simon the Zealot? We can put together some of the clues from stories that go back to the first and second centuries.

1. What happened to Simon the Zealot?

The stories during the time of the early church are rather scanty about Simon. I think it is because he never stayed put long enough to nail him down. Simon remained the zealot; he remained the fiery,

passionate man. We know he ministered in the Black Sea area. We also know he ministered in Northern Africa. We know as well, that he even pioneered a work in what is now, Great Britain. Finally, however, in Persia, the mob was so incensed that they took his life. Simon was a zealot who never slowed down.

Some of you may be like this. Make sure that your zeal involves sensitivity.

2. What happened to James?

We learn of James in Acts 12:1-3a.

Now about that time Herod the king laid hands on some who belonged to the church in order to mistreat them. And he had James the brother of John put to death with a sword. When he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to arrest Peter also....

James was martyred. However, that really was not all that happened. The church, at that time, was growing and flourishing. Several men were evidently, out front. James, I believe, was the key point man. He was the mouth; the passionate one; the spokesman. We know this because when Herod decided to stamp out the church, who did he arrest? Did he arrest Peter? No, he arrested James and had him beheaded.

Herod saw that this pleased the crowd, so he went after the number two man. This was Peter, who became number one after James lost his life.

James, evidently to the very end, remained a passionate individual. He was a thriving, zealous man, who was so committed to the cause of Christ that he would eventually, give his life away.

However, was James changed? Stories abound about this man. One tells that James was on his way to being beheaded and a Roman soldier, that he had previously despised, was rather apologetic when he noticed the spirit of James. The soldier sort of apologized for the rough treatment James had received at the hands of the Roman soldiers. The story tells that James turned and embraced his captor and said, “Peace to thee. I forgive thee.”

This Roman soldier was evidently, so overwhelmed by James’s forgiveness that he knelt and confessed Christ. That day, two were beheaded instead of one.

God had re-channeled James’ passion. He would say, like Old Testament Jehu,

... “Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord.” ... (II Kings 10:16)

3. What happened to John?

We know a lot about John because he wrote five books of our New Testament – the gospel of John, I, II, and III John, and Revelation.

We know John was exiled for a period of time because of his stand. He would remain a “Son of Thunder”.

When he was brought back, however, the rest of his life was spent discipling men like Polycarp and Ignatius. He spent time with men who would lead the second century church into greatness. Yet, he would be a disciple who was no longer called the “Son of Thunder” by those who knew him best. He would instead, be characterized as the “disciple of love”.

The theme of John’s writing would be love. In his gospel, he never used his name. Once so ambitious, John referred to himself as, “the disciple whom Jesus loved”.

Why did John refer to himself in this way? He said this because he was so overwhelmed with the fact that Jesus loved him. He said, “I’m the disciple Jesus loved.”

Application

Perhaps today, you have identified with these disciples. I am sure you have at times. What does God, through Christ, want to do in discipling us that we might become transformed like these individuals? Let me give three steps. There are more, but let me whittle it down to three simple thoughts.

1. First, as God, through Christ, disciples you, allow Him to expose your emotions.

Now I said to allow God to do this. Do you know why? Because Satan would love to disciple you. He, in fact, tries to all the time. He whispers in your ear what you are really like, which derails more believers than anything else. When Jesus Christ disciples you, it always leads to hope. He will always point you to what He can make you. Satan always points you to what you are.

Allow God to expose what you are really like; to expose your emotions. In that exposition, confess to Him. This is painful because at times, you will recognize that in your flesh dwelleth no good thing; you will recognize your failure and that may hurt.

I like the comic strip *Peanuts* because there is a lot of great theology in it. In one strip Lucy is giving a sermon to Charlie Brown, telling him of all the areas in which he has failed. He has failed over here and he

has failed over there, and Lucy is just giving it to Charlie Brown. Finally, she smugly says, “But Charlie Brown, don’t forget – you learn more from your failures than from your victories.”

Charlie Brown is standing there kind of slump-shouldered. He says, “Well, I guess that makes me the smartest man in the whole world.”

You may feel, as more discipleship takes place, rather brilliant because you know yourself.

A disciple is not one who holds back because of failure. A disciple is one who moves forward in spite of failure.

2. Secondly, accept God’s method of transformation.

This is tough. The cup and all that is in it, He designed especially for you – to make you. Now accept the methods that He has chosen to use to make you like Christ. It may be an irritating employer or employee; it may be a neighbor; it may be a Christian; it may be a child that God has chosen to work through to transform you.

What tool is more painful in the hand of God than a child? I was talking to a lady last week and she told that her little girl had marked her brother’s face with magic marker – just covered it. Before the Mom discovered it, this little three-and-a-half year old ran into the kitchen and began explaining to her mother and giving her the once-around, “Now, Mommy, he has a little bit of magic marker on his face.”

Finally, she saw the color of her mother’s face. Some of you, who are mothers, have the same coloring at times like this. You go from winter to red hot, or something like that. This mother started getting angry and her young daughter said, “Now, Mommy, just relax.”

You do not want to relax! You want to escape, right? Whatever it is in your life that God is using, you want to run.

Those who have little children will really appreciate this. I heard about a little kid who was telling a boy down the street, “Hey, I finally figured out why Joseph and Mary took baby Jesus with them when they escaped to Egypt.”

His friend said, “Why?”

He said, “Cause they couldn’t find a sitter.”

Whatever God has chosen to use in your life, remember that He has chosen it because He knows better than we do.

3. Thirdly, allow God time to work.

Do not stop with simply allowing God to expose your emotions and accepting the method He uses to transform you. Please give God time to work.

So often our problems are related to our impatience. We pray, “God, I know I need change here. Now, would You please just move it along. I don’t want You to take twenty-five years. I want You to do it in twenty-five days or twenty-five minutes.”

May I say, by way of encouragement, that the very fact that you recognize that God needs to change something about you is a great step forward. Most of the believers in our community have never come to that first step. They think they have arrived; they have reached maturation. They think there is nothing more God can do in their lives.

Howard Hendricks would often tell our seminary class, “Live with a sense of dissatisfaction with your preaching or your teaching.”

These are encouraging words – “Live with a sense of dissatisfaction . . .”! However, what greater advice could he have given?

Have you ever sat under a Bible teacher or preacher who thought they had no room for improvement? That was exciting, was it not?

I like the words Henry Ward Beecher said to his congregation one time. A very eloquent man, he said, “Should you fall asleep during this morning’s sermon, I have given the ushers permission to wake up the preacher.”

This is a little convicting! Let us move on. And by the way, wake up!

This principal applies not only to preaching, but to life. We should live with a sense of dissatisfaction. If you do not have it, then it should be your first prayer.

The apostle Paul, though mature in the Lord, said, ***Wretched man that I am! . . . (Romans 7:24a)***

What kind of self image is that? He said,

For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. (Romans 7:19)

Paul continued,

. . . Who will set me free from the body of this death? (Romans 7:24b)

Good grief!

However, do not stop at this because Paul ends this by saying,

Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! . . . (Romans 7:25a)

You may feel overwhelmed with all that God needs to do in your life. Accept the methods that He has used and then, give Him time to use them. Discipleship is obedience over a lifetime.

Let me give one more snapshot. Turn to the Acts chapter 8 to take a brief, but closer look at John. We know that the early church is flourishing and there are believers coming to Christ. We also know the ministry of the Holy Spirit must accompany the doctrinal teaching in this transitional period of the New Testament. We read in Acts 8:14a,

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God. .

Did you catch this? *Samaria* had received the word of God!

Who did the apostles send to pray with them? Continue to Acts 8:14b-15.

. . . they sent them Peter and John, who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

I love this! This is the man who had said, five years earlier, “Lord, let’s wipe them out. We’d be better off. Let’s clear the slate. Samaritans – we don’t need them.”

Now, after this period of time, who do the disciples send to minister to, to disciple, to work with the Samaritans? John.

My friend, God is committed to changing you from passionate, and resentful, and insensitive, and angry into men and women characterized by this kind of love. Can you imagine praying with someone who earlier, had infuriated you? It may take years for this change to occur, by the way, but like John, it will finally come. That is undoubtedly the wonder of discipleship.

As you and I yield to God; as we allow Him to work in our lives; as we drink the cup that He has designed for us with all that it involves; as we accept the tools in His hand as His tools for us; as we allow Him to work and take all the time that He wants, we

will be transformed by the power of the Disciple
Maker.