

Salome: The Mother of Boanerges

Blog #56 by: Bill Watson

We are introduced to the Zebedee family in Mark 1:19-20. They are in the fishing business and are in their boat, mending their nets. Jesus comes walking by after calling both Peter and his brother Andrew to follow Him, and says to James and his brother John to follow Him as well.

Apparently, we are told they left their dad immediately, who was in the boat with the hired servants, and followed Jesus. This appears to be an odd situation. Clearly, who just leaves their family business (which was large enough to have hired help) when asked by what appears to be a stranger, and to follow Him (Matt. 4:21-22)? It doesn't seem to make sense unless, perhaps, Jesus wasn't a stranger? This will become clearer as we proceed.

Salome was probably at home while the men in her family were preparing to fish, as their vocation required. But at the time, it's fair to say, Salome was unaware of their departure from the family fishing business. Now we're left to think the boys disappeared with this stranger, but is this true? Not according to Biblical scholar Charles Barkley, the Catholic Encyclopedia, the topical Bible, and other sources. They all claim that Salome was Mary's (Jesus' earthly mother) sister. Others claim she may have been at least a cousin, much like Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist.

But when considering the circumstances surrounding the solicitation of her boys, it would appear that some familiarity with Jesus led them to *leave immediately* upon Jesus' request. This would seem to explain why they trusted him so quickly and left the family's rather large fishing business.

Now, Jesus had a nickname for both James the Greater and John. It was "Boanerges!" It meant, *sons of thunder!* Assuming these brothers were indeed Jesus' cousins because Salome may have been Mary's sister, it's fair to say they knew each other rather well, having grown up together, which explains why they left without hesitation.

The Zebedee family was notably exuberant and largely involved. It becomes clear that Salome is very supportive, given the nature of her question. Notice what happened in Matthew 20. Salome approaches Jesus with a request. However, she approaches Him with reverence and adoration, which is what the Greek word means that was translated "worshipping." So, she comes to Him with this request regarding her sons. "She says, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on your right hand, and the other on the left, in your kingdom."

Jesus pushes back and says, "You know not what you ask. Are you able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able." When Jesus heard that, He warned them that they would indeed drink of His cup, but He did not have the authority to grant her request; the Father reserves that authority unto Himself.

Considering the boldness of this request, it makes you wonder who actually was the "thunder" behind these Zebedee brothers! It seems that Salome had some "thunder" of her

own, given how she insisted that her two boys be elevated to leadership positions alongside Jesus. It was apparently emphatic and demanding because it angered the rest of the disciples. We are told, “when the ten heard it, they were moved with indignation (sorely displeased, greatly afflicted) against (accusative, concerning) the two brethren” (Matt. 20:24). So, her demeanor was not appreciated by the rest of the disciples.

These boys of Salome are real rascals. We come to understand they tolerate no nonsense. This is brought out in the situation where Jesus is looking for a place to rest, and they come into a village, but they are not received. This didn't sit well with James and John, and they responded with anger and violence. They asked Jesus, “...will you that we commend fire to come down from heaven and consume them, even as Elijah did (Luke 9:52-54)? In other words, let's obliterate them all! Jesus had to resist them and said: “You know not what manner of spirit you are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them” (Luke 9:55-56). And so they simply went on to another village.

But this gives you an idea of this family's dedication and zeal for the work of God and their unending, relentless support for Christ's ministry. Even until the end, we find Salome among the women at the crucifixion (John 19:25). She was there, on site, watching everything that went down regarding Jesus' betrayal, trial, and execution. Salome saw it all, including the Sunday morning of His resurrection, while bringing spices to the tomb for anointing (Mark 16:1-2).

She was always in the background, showing her support and, by that behavior, acknowledging that it was dangerous work that also jeopardized the lives of her two sons, James and John. Her fears were not misplaced since we know James, her son, was the first recorded martyr of the church (Acts 12:1-2). Her other son, John, was part of Jesus' inner circle of trust and wrote 5 books of the New Testament. This family was deeply embedded in Christ's ministry and critical to its getting started in those early years.

Salome was a woman of strong faith and commitment. She proved it by her works! She expressed her unfathomable assistance and comfort to the other women and men during the *horrific time of distress and disappointment* when Christ was in the midst of His day of betrayal and execution upon the stake! From the small window we have of her in the pages of our Bible, we can be assured she wanted nothing more than the best for her boys, knowing full well they were both on a very dangerous and perilous journey as disciples of Jesus Christ.

She was a *strong and substantial witness* for Christ's ministry, and she knew that the most important thing about serving the people for Christ is that it wasn't about her. It was bigger than her. It was *about redemption and salvation for mankind*, and about how we are committed to reflecting the epic God has designed for the greater whole of humanity!