

Less Means More

Bubba Garner

When someone has a “the” after their first name, the next word is usually complimentary: Alexander the Great, Louis the Beloved, Philip the Fair, Carnac the Magnificent. But for one man in Scripture, it was “James the Less” (Mk. 15:30).

While it is never stated, it is believed that this is the same apostle listed as “James the son of Alphaeus.” The Greek word less in Mark 15:30 (mikros) means “small” or “little.” There are at least three possibilities as to why James was the one they called “the less.”

- his age: other versions have “James the younger” (NIV, ESV)
- his size: he may have been like Zaccheus, “small in stature” (Luke 19:3)
- his status: he was not as well-known as James the son of Zebedee, sometimes called “James the Greater”

“Less is More” is a phrase first attributed to Robert Browning in a poem he wrote in 1855. It is still used today in the advertising world to warn that too much emphasis is no emphasis at all. You can end up obscuring the very message you want to draw attention to.

But in God’s kingdom, less means more. Don’t be afraid to be called “the Less.”

Less means more years to serve. Young age has never been a disqualification to serve God. Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery. Not long after, he resisted sexual sin with Potiphar’s wife (Gen. 39:9). When David went out to fight Goliath, the giant “disdained him, for he was but a youth” (1 Sam. 17:42). And what about Jesus? Not much is revealed about His life from the age of 12 to 30, except this one verse: “And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52).

If you’re young, view your age as a blessing. You have more years to be an example. “Let no one look down on your youthfulness” (1 Tim. 4:12). You can’t control how others treat you. But what you can do is “show yourself an example” in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. You have more years to learn. There is wisdom all around you. Soak it in. One day, you’ll be the one to pass it on. You have more years to be an influence. You are surrounded by more opportunities to share the gospel than any other time of life. Rescue those around you who need the good news of the gospel. Less means more.

Less means more room to grow. It should be our goal to advance higher and higher

in our faith. In describing the qualities that need to be a part of the Christian's life, Peter said they must be "yours and increasing" (2 Pet. 1:8). This will help us individually; but it will also cause the growth of the body. A body where every member is important.

There are no small roles in God's kingdom. Just as we don't have the right to think we are more important than everyone else, neither do we have the right to say we don't matter at all (see 1 Cor. 12:12-27). What did Jesus say about Mary and her simple act of service? "She has done what she could" (Mark 14:8). When we follow her example, the Master will say to us, "You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things" (Matt. 25:21,23). Less means more.

Less means more opportunities to glorify God. Jesus' own disciples had a change of focus. At first, they were in competition with one another about who was the greatest. James the Greater was one of the "sons of thunder." He was in the "inner circle." James the Less was always mentioned near the bottom of the list of apostles. But eventually, they reached the point where they could say, "We do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus's sake" (2 Cor. 4:5).

Our goal should not just be "less of self" but "none of self and all of Thee." It's not about leaving a legacy or wanting people to remember our name. It is the name of Christ that is to be magnified. And service rendered to our fellow man is service that honors Him. "To the extent you did it to one of these brothers of mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me" (Matt. 25:40). Less means more!

In the end, James the Less received a great reward. We can hear the same words of commendation from our Master. That is no small matter.