Simon the Zealot

Simon was likely a member of the revolutionary group known as Zealots. These Jews hated the Roman rule and terrorized them whenever possible. They hoped the Messiah would establish his own rule here on earth and restore ancient Israel. Simon’s symbol depicts a Bible, which symbolizes his zeal to preach the gospel throughout Mesopotamia. The fish represents another fisher of men.

HIS NAME

Just as Peter is called the fisherman, Matthew the tax collector, and Judas the traitor, so Simon includes an identifying name: the Zealot. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all refer to him as Simon the Zealot (Zelotes in KJV). Some versions of the Bible also call him Simon the Canaanite, which does not necessarily mean that he was from Cana, but rather that he was a zealous individual. Here is a man we know by name only and not by his words or actions, for there is no recorded information on this man other than his descriptive name.

At the time of the New Testament, there were four basic parties, or sects, among the Jews. The Pharisees were the staunch traditionalists, or fundamentalists, of their day. The Sadducees were the rich, influential, and liberal Greek-minded sect that had control over the temple. The Essenes (not mentioned in Scripture) were a group of celibates who lived in the desert region. (The Dead Sea Scrolls are attributed to the Essenes.) The final group was the Zealots.

The Zealots were extremists opposed to Roman rule. They detested Rome and its powerful control over the Jewish people. Their hope was for the Messiah to come and restore his kingdom on earth. They were a terrorist group that took every opportunity to assassinate and kill Romans and their sympathizers. (An extreme segment of the Zealots were the Sicarii, the “dagger men” or assassins.) Most considered them militant outlaws who caused chaos for the Romans. A man named Judas the Galilean (Acts 5:37) was the supposed founder of this group. He was eventually arrested and killed. He and his followers felt it was wrong for God’s people to pay taxes to an evil, heathen government such as Rome.

How Simon got to know Jesus is a mystery; however, it is very likely that he had hopes that Jesus would be the one to overthrow the Roman oppression. Little did he realize that he would soon be fighting a far greater oppressor than Rome.

As a Zealot, Simon once lived his life on the opposite end of the spectrum from Matthew. Matthew, a Roman sympathizer and hated by the Jews because he was a tax gatherer, was despised by the Zealots of his day. Whereas Simon (the tax hater) once might have considered a dagger for Matthew (the tax collector) later he became a compatriot of Matthew’s, spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ to the remote corners of the world.

Here we can appreciate the beauty of the Christian church. Coming together as a people of every possible race, political background, nationality, and personality, Christians rise up to form a church that is alive with love for one another. Each member becomes a servant of the master, Jesus Christ. The miracle of joining twelve men together with such opposite natures and personalities is mirrored in the miracle of an entire Church that spans the world.

Since he is listed in the lowest group of apostles, it is often considered that he and Judas Iscariot were paired up together when the Savior sent them out among the people.
SIMON’S LAST DAYS

It should be remembered that the life as a politically minded Zealot had been left behind as Simon grew ever closer to his Savior. Although insignificant in mention, having no recorded words in Scripture, this man was indeed chosen for his special qualities. The Lord wanted him to play an important part in the formation and growth of the early Christian church. Perhaps this fiery revolutionary was picked because he was better prepared to die for a cause.

Tradition says that Simon preached to the people of the British Isles. Quite likely he was martyred for sharing the gospel message. Here was a man once willing to die for his zealous political views, paying the ultimate price as a zealous defender of the gospel of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Discuss: Discuss the complete reversal that both Matthew and Simon had to make in order to follow Jesus. What was the only way they could accomplish such a change? How do you think Simon and Matthew later got along with one another?

ST. SIMON’S DAY:
October 28