

Christ Community Covenant Church
The Little Letters
James the Brother of Christ – “Proven Faith - Dead Faith”
Pastor Dave Scherrer - March 20, 2011

I want to add a little spice today; I want you to help me with the sermon. If you have a question or a comment I want you to just raise your hand or catch my attention and we will get to it. I will also ask your opinion on a couple of ideas so be ready to respond then with your thoughts. Your thoughts have to be brief and your questions ‘on topic’ so don’t fall asleep this morning! My hope is to make this morning a bit more conversational and interactive.

Let’s read this portion of James together:

James 1:2-12

² **Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, ³for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. ⁴And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.**

⁵ **If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; ⁸ he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.**

⁹ **Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, ¹⁰and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. ¹¹For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.**

¹² **Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.**

Thoughts?

James the Controversial

And James, the letter we are studying, has always had a bit of a controversial history. Although early church figures quoted from this little letter, it seems to have taken a while for this book to be formally included in the Bible, about 300 years. It doesn’t read like a personal letter like some of the others we have been studying. It is more like an Old Testament wisdom book, like the proverbs; a series of almost poetic statements about the way we should live as Christians. It is interesting that James has a nickname, James the Just. Not James the Gentle or James the Nice not even James the Truthful, but James the Just. He writes a letter to his church that is pretty firm, even stern. But it is a just letter. I like that about James the Just. He speaks the truth with love. I have said before from up here my goal is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. I am in good company when it comes to exploring this little letter.

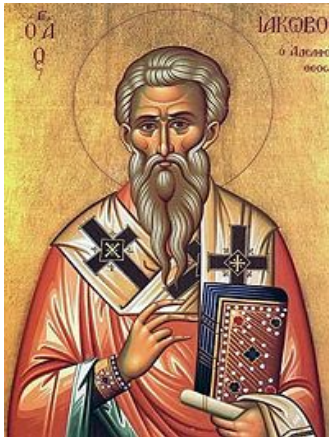
So who is this mysterious writer who has engendered so much attention and controversy? Let’s read the first verse together and let’s see how James describes himself . . .

James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. (James 1:1)

There are several men named James mentioned in the New Testament, but reliable tradition assigns this book to the one called James the Just - the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55), and brother of Jude (Jude 1), who led the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). Although James was reared in the same home with the Lord Jesus, James apparently did not become a believer until after Jesus arose from death and the grave. Even after our Lord began His public ministry, John

wrote: "For neither did His brethren believe in Him" (John 7:5). Again Paul indicated in his letter to the Corinthians: "He rose again the third day . . . After that, He was seen of James; then of all the apostles" (1 Cor. 15:4, 7).

An early history of the church says that James was such a man of prayer that his knees had large, thick calluses, making them look like the knees of a camel. It also says that James was martyred in Jerusalem by being pushed from a high point of the temple; the fall did not kill him, and he was beaten to death on the ground as he prayed for his attackers.



A bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ: Knowing that this James was the half-brother of Jesus makes his self-introduction all the more significant. He does not proclaim himself "the brother of Jesus", but only "a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus was not just James' brother, more importantly, Jesus was his Lord. And 'bondservant' is an important word. It translates the ancient Greek word *doulos*: "A slave, a bondservant, one who is in a permanent relation of servitude to another . . ." Among the Greeks, with their strong sense of personal freedom, the term carried a degrading connotation. And the word Lord is an important word. It translates the ancient Greek word *kurios*. It means that James considered Jesus God.

To the twelve tribes: What James means by the reference to the twelve tribes is difficult to understand. Is James writing a letter just to Christians from a Jewish background, or to all Christians? Certainly, this letter applies to all Christians, but probably, James wrote his letter before Gentiles were brought into the church, or before Gentile Christians emerged in any significant number.

Which are scattered abroad: At this time, the Jewish people were scattered all over the world. There were Christian communities among almost every Jewish community throughout the world. Regarding the extent of the dispersion, Josephus wrote: "There is no city, no tribe, whether Greek or barbarian, in which Jewish law and Jewish customs have not taken root."

Questions or thoughts here?

Why do you think James would not highlight the fact that he was the brother of Jesus?

Is the idea of bondservant a way that you describe yourself to yourself? Why or why not?

Two Great Themes and one Overarching Thought

Theme 1: Tests vs. temptations

Theme 2: Faith vs. works

Overarching Thought: Transformation

Two great themes in this little letter; the idea of trials as opposed to temptation, and the idea of faith as opposed to works. And the overarching thought is that all of this is about transformation.

Theme 1: Testing or Trials VS Temptations

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

I find it a bit fascinating that it says consider it all joy. Another translation says pure joy. But there is a reason James can say that. This suffering and trial produces in us something that cannot be had without suffering and trial. That is steadfastness in faith. It leads to a transformation; from drifting to centered. From uncertain to true.

Trials have a way of perfecting us when we approach them with the right attitude and perspective. And that is no small task.

You know what this is? It is a monument put up in Enterprise, Alabama in 1919.



In 1910 the boll weevil wiped out most of the cotton crop in the south forcing southern farmers to diversify by planting peanuts and other new crops. The change brought prosperity to the region. Growers in Enterprise, Alabama, were so grateful to the destructive beetle for ending their one-crop dependency that they eventually erected a monument to him in their town square in 1919. Time has a way of putting trials and tests into the right perspective.

The difference between a trial and a temptation is:

Satan tempts us to bring out the worst in us, but God tests us to bring out the best in us.

Trial . . .

Is a God given opportunity for you to practice and thereby test your spiritual relationship to the Lord. (James 1:2-5, 12)

**It is an opportunity to honor Christ in your life. (1 Peter 1:7)
It is an opportunity to prove your convictions to yourself. (Romans 5:1-5)**

Illustration: The test of gold:

Gold is a heavy ductile metal and gold is an Element. Fool's gold is actually Iron Pyrite and is brittle and light compared to gold. Gold has a specific gravity around 19 while fool's gold (iron pyrite) has a specific gravity of 4.95 to 5.10. Fool's gold is harder than gold. The hardness of fool's gold is 6 to 6.5 while gold is softer and has a hardness of 2.5 on the Mohs scale of hardness.

On the other hand a temptation does not originate with God. James 1:13-15 explains:

James 1:13-15

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. ¹⁴But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. ¹⁵Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

Thoughts?

Theme 2: Faith VS Works

James wrote in about the year 40 to 45. Paul was teaching during this time but his first letters are thought to have been written some 15 to 20 years later. So were these authors trying to correct something in each others teachings?

Paul wrote that "a man is justified by faith" (Romans 3:28) and James wrote "You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only" (James 2:24).

Paul says in Ephesians that we are "Saved by grace through faith, not of works (Antinomianism: doctrine that faith in God alone is necessary for salvation, without necessity of moral law).

James says, "You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone." James 2:24 (So is this anti – antinomianism?).

James is addressing the fruit of salvation, while Paul is addressing the root of salvation.

- James seems to look at how our spiritual status is seen and recognized by others, while Paul looks at how it is seen and initiated by God.
- For James, "works" means good deeds—charity, Christian love, etc; but for Paul works refers to works of the Law which some see as necessary for salvation, rendering the cross-work of Christ as insufficient. Thus, once again, they are not talking about the same thing.
- James is saying that faith which does not save is intellectual assent; Paul is saying that a faith that saves is a heart-response to God's call—it is trust in, not just belief that. Thus, they are not talking about the same thing.
- Paul deals with the inner faith of man's heart as God sees it, while James concerns his discourse with the outward fruits of faith as man sees them.

God knows whether or not I am a true believer on the basis of my faith apart from any works, but men can only know whether or not I am a true believer as they observe my life outwardly. Jesus said (Matthew 7:16, 21) we can distinguish between the true and the false only by a man's fruits.

True Faith and Dead Faith

James 2:14-19, 26

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. ¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

²⁶For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

What counts with God? "Faith." But what kind of faith? Faith that "works through love." Paul in Galatians talks about a faith that expresses itself in love. He is not saying that there is "faith" plus a layer of loving works added to faith. He says that what counts with God is the kind of faith that by its nature produces love. But it is faith that gives us our right standing with God. The love that comes from it only shows that it is, in fact, real living, and justifying faith.

Now that, I think, is what James was trying to get across to his churches. Loveless faith is absolutely useless; and anybody that comes along and says "We are justified by faith alone, and so you don't have to be a loving person to go to heaven" is not telling the truth.

James' concern is with a kind of counterfeit faith that does not produce love. This faith cannot justify anybody. Verse 14: "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him?" You see his concern. "Can that faith save him?" Such faith is not going to save. What kind of works is James interested in? The same kind Paul is - the works of love. Verses 15-16: "If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" So James' concern is that people have real saving faith, not counterfeit faith. And the difference is that the real faith produces loving behavior.

Transformation – The Merciful Promise of God

It has been said that God loves us too much to leave us the way we are. Trials and suffering that is met with humbleness and obedience produces in us a change. We are transformed. And this is an important word to God. Paul directs us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds; by letting the truth that is Jesus Christ have first and final sway in our lives. It will force out the emotional decisions based on whim and impulse and save us from temptations that will hurt us and those we love. These trials we have been talking about build in a proven faith, a faith that lets us live like we really are. With proven faith comes proven character and others can see it. To be transformed means to be more like Christ in our attitudes and behavior. At our new website you will read that our desire is to pursue Jesus and His priorities in the world. Only God can make us want to have this vision, this purpose.

I have a question for you. Has it been days or months or years since you felt the radical transformation of God? Are you yielding moment by moment or have you been coasting in your faith?

Do you want to be transformed? Not merely braced up and patched together. Do you want to be top to bottom, whole heartedly and completely transformed so that old is swallowed up in new, and you are freed from the past for the hope of the future? I do. We will talk more about that next week!