

A FAITH THAT WORKS

(A Study of the Book of James)

The Book of James – What's In It For Me?

TEXT: James 1:1

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to take you to a new book of the Bible for us to begin studying as a part of our Sunday morning worship: the Book of James. For many, this short book of the New Testament is virtually unknown. They may even think that James stands in opposition to the better known epistles of Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians which trumpet the declaration that salvation comes by grace through faith, because James says that faith without works is dead.

While we will explore completely what James was saying about the relationship between faith and works in the weeks to come, I hope you can already see that the writings do not constitute an elementary understanding of Christianity. On the contrary, there are some deep shafts in this mine called Book of James that offer the treasure of rich veins of truth to those who are willing to dig.

In fact, something that few people know, even many serious Bible students, is that the Book of James may be the first book of the New Testament written, preceding each of the gospels and all of the writings of John. How many of you knew that?

But now, let me try to answer the question about the Book of James that is probably on the minds of most of you in this room right now.

- What's in it for me?
- What does the study of the Book of James offer to me in my life right now?
- What can I get out of it?
- What needs or desires do I have that the words of the Book of James might meet?
- What's in it for me?

That's a fair question, and this morning I am going to try to answer it, at least in part. Certainly I cannot give you a complete answer until we finish the study, and we both see the full extent of the issues addressed and the direct applications to our lives that have been made in the five chapters that comprise this book.

But allow me to tell you in a more general sense what this book has for you within its pages. The first thing is revealed in verse one of the letter itself.

James 1:1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

What is in the Book of James for you?

I. A VIEW OF A MAN WHO WENT FROM MALICIOUSNESS TO MARTYRDOM.

- From antagonism to adoration
- From resentment to reverence
- From disdain to dedication

Who is this man whose life is the story of grand transformation? James 1:1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

He identifies himself only as James, a servant of the Lord Jesus.

And James was an exceedingly common name in days our Lord walked upon the earth and in the century after. Surely there must have been hundreds of James counted among the followers of Christ, maybe thousands.

So why does he not tell us more about which James he is at least saying James the son of whoever. And the fact that he does not tell us in turn tells us a great deal.

- He does not say more because he does not need to.
- He does not identify which James he is because the recipients of his letter knew who he was.
- In fact, probably every Christian alive in the days he wrote his letter knew exactly who he was.
- So, why don't we know?
 - We can figure it out if we go back to our Bibles.
 - There are five different people named James in the New Testament:

Luke 6:16 Judas the son of James, and Judas Iscariot who also became a traitor.

Luke 6:15 Matthew and Thomas; James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called the Zealot;

Mark 15:40 There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome,

Now, of these three James, we know virtually nothing else, which means they cannot be the James we are looking for because he becomes very well known so that when he signs his letter James, he doesn’t even have to write his last name.

The fourth James listed in the New Testament is a much better candidate because he is indeed much better known, and in fact, he is the James most of you know from the gospels. If we were to do a fill in the blank, even without further explanation, almost all of you could supply the missing name:

Peter, _____, and John

Of course

Peter, James, and John

And we know that this is **James, the brother of John and the son of Zebedee**. And there are a whole host of references to this James throughout the gospels.

So, have we found him? Have we identified the James who wrote the letter we are studying? No, it is not James the brother of John and the son of Zebedee.

How do we know? Because James the son of Zebedee was killed before the letter of James was written.

Acts 12:1–2 1 Now about that time Herod the king stretched out his hand to harass some from the church. 2 Then he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

So still we ask, who is the well known James who wrote the letter that bears his name?

There is only one other in the New Testament.

Matthew 13:54–56 54 When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?

55 Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers **James**, **Joses**, **Simon**, and **Judas**?

56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?”

This James is the brother of Jesus.

Jesus was the Son of God and the Son of Mary.

James was the son of Joseph and Mary.

But you say, “But Bro. Mike, did you not say that James the author of the letter began in

- animus and
- disapproval which progressed to

- resentment and even
- maliciousness.

Yes, that’s right. Let’s read the rest of that passage in Matthew.

Matthew 13:54–57 54 When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, “Where did this Man get this wisdom and these mighty works?

55 Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?

56 And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this Man get all these things?”

57 So they were offended at Him. But **Jesus said to them**, “*A prophet is not without honor except in his own country and in his own house.*”

Did you or do you have trouble at home growing up? So did Jesus.

- And James was part of the trouble.
- James did not believe in Jesus.
- James and his other brothers and sisters did not believe Jesus was the Son of God, the Messiah, the Promised Savior of the world.

All through their childhood, teen years, and even as young adults, the brothers and sisters of Jesus did not believe in Him.

John says this plainly.

John 7:2–5 2 Now the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles was at hand.

3 His brothers therefore said to Him, “Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. 4 For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.”

5 For even His brothers did not believe in Him.

James and his brothers not only did not believe, they mocked Jesus. They taunted Him. Here in John 7, they were saying, go to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Tabernacles and prove to everyone You are the Son of God by doing many miracles. Then everyone will know. Then we will know!

But James and his brothers did not believe in Jesus.

However, in spite of all the miracles Jesus did James and his brothers did not believe. Jesus went to the cross, and the only one in His family who believed He was dying for the sin of the world was His mother. She knew. She knew who Jesus was before He was born. She believed the angel. She knew she was still a virgin when the body of Jesus

began to form in her womb. She continued to believe and ultimately trusted in Christ as her own Savior and Lord.

But not James, and not the rest of the family. Joseph had long been dead; so only Mary believed.

Until Jesus rose from the dead. He had told them He would, and His brothers in the flesh no doubt scoffed and laughed at Him.

But **1 Corinthians 15** tells us that after Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to His twelve disciples, **the Resurrected Jesus went to see James.**

- And as the Apostle John first truly trusted in Jesus as he knelt in the tomb and saw the grave clothes lying on the rock slab, clearly indicating the body of Jesus had just passed through them,
- And as doubting Thomas fell on his knees in faith before the Risen Christ who had come back to show the reluctant disciple the wounds remaining in His wrists and feet and side,
- So also **James, the brother of Jesus in the flesh, finally believed and became the brother of Jesus in the Spirit as well.** We don't know if Jesus' other brothers were there when the Lord appeared to James or if James ran out to tell them Jesus truly was risen and truly was the Messiah, the Savior; but we do know that ultimately all of his brothers and most likely his earthly sisters as well believed, for when the believers gathered in the upper room following the ascension of Jesus back into heaven, the family of Jesus with whom He grew up in Nazareth were there.

Two of them would be chosen by God to write books of the New Testament. James and Judas, whom we call Jude. And when they write, they write two of the most hard-core books in the Bible. They cut sinners no slack and yield not an inch to ungodliness!

And the testimony of this transformation that God did in their lives, we need to see.

- Some of you here today need that transformation, and you can have it!
- Some are in the middle of being transformed like that at this very moment.
- Almost all of us know people who are like James and Jude who are skeptical, unbelieving scoffers.
 - We will benefit in our understanding of these people as we read about the change God made in James.
 - And we will be encouraged to know that as these unbelievers we know are today, so James once was.
 - And we can look at what God did in James' life, and
 - Not give up on the atheists and agnostics God has put around us.

But James was not just a convert who turned around and wrote a book.

No, James became the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Jerusalem! Very quickly James grew in the Lord and became the stalwart leader of the first church in Jerusalem, and we read about him in the role in the Book of Acts.

Ultimately, James was stoned to death because of his faith in and faithfulness to the Lord Jesus Christ. James became a martyr.

And that is why I tell you in answer to the question, **“What is in the Book of James for me?”** I tell you, **in this book we get to see a view of a man who went from maliciousness to martyrdom,**

from antagonism to adoration,

from resentment to reverence,

from disdain to dedication.

We see it in the book not as an autobiography but in his words, in the product of his transformation. When he talks about the double minded man receives nothing from God he is remembering the many years of his life he wasted in double mindedness. And when he talks about trials, he speaks as a man whose life was constantly under threat and ultimately died as angry men hurled rock after rock at his body, breaking one bone and then another until finally one merciful stone hit him in the temple and he was ushered into the presence of the Master.

And that's just one of the things that's in it for you... and for me as well.

I was going to tell you three things, but time is only going to allow me to tell you two, so let me give you the most important one.

II. IN THE BOOK OF JAMES WE HAVE (AS WITH EVERY OTHER PART OF THE BIBLE) THE VERY WORD OF GOD TO US.

2 Peter 1:21 for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

While the words of James come out of his own experience with God,

- First his rejection of Jesus as the Son of God
- Out of his skepticism and hard heartedness
- Out of his desire to hold onto the philosophies of men
- And then to his sudden realization that all of his life he had been wrong, terribly, terribly wrong,
- And out of knowing the cost of his sin, not only in his own life but in the lives of others he dearly loved
- And most of all that it was his own sin that sent his brother Jesus to be tortured and hung upon a Roman cross on top of that skull shaped hill
- And though his words came out of his glorious transformation, the casting off of the old man, and the putting on of the new man
- And then out of his very daily experience of walking with the Risen Christ and out of endless hours of prayerful fellowship with Him

ULTIMATELY, the words written in his book were the Words of God.

The Holy Spirit who lived in James made it happen.

I THINK James is making reference to this fact in his greeting in verse 1.

James 1:1 James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings.

He is reminding the recipients, that he is just the servant of the Lord, doing what God tells him to do and saying what God wants him to say.

As Paul explains to his protégé in ministry, Timothy,

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

- **Inspiration means “Breathed Out”**
- **All Scripture is breathed out by God.**

And **the consequence of that is that all Scripture is profitable**, useful, for

- **Doctrine (to teach us)**
- **Reproof (to reveal what is wrong)**
- **Correction (show us the way to fix what is wrong)**
- **Instruction in righteousness (teach us the right way)**

And that is most certainly true of the Book of James. As we read and study this short but powerful book, we will hear the echo of the voice of James speaking from the experiences of his own life with the Lord, but far more prominently, we will hear the voice of God Himself who will

- Teach us the nature of true faith verses casual “believe-ism.”
- We will sense the conviction of the Holy Spirit of the times we show favoritism, of our failure to put our faith to work, of the times our own tongue has been set on fire by hell.
- God will speak to us out of the words of this book to tell us how to move from the conviction and guilt we feel for the times and ways we have sinned to set things straight and make things right with Him and with others.
- And time after time, God will teach us the way to walk in His Way, the way of righteousness.

And that's what's in it for you, ... and for me.

But let me say to you, you will only get what God has put in it for you, if you make some effort to receive it. That starts by making an effort to be here as much as you possibly can.

- I know there are times you have to miss. There are times I will miss and one of the staff will teach from this book in my place.

- And listen, if you are running a fever with the flu, please don't come here and share it with the rest of us. Go online at sabc.org and hear the message and join in worship with us from afar.
- But if your fingernail hurts, and it's not leprosy, put a Band-Aid on it and come on to church!
- You may have to travel a weekend or two. I will be out of the country on mission a couple of times. I understand. God understands. Again, join us online, live or after the fact.
- But don't take your family on a short pleasure trip just every time you get a chance. Be committed to have your family at church as much as is humanly possible. Do some things here. Many you live in a place people pay big money to come to year after year. Enjoy it over the weekend and be in church on Sunday morning!
- I'm just saying, God is worth it. God is worthy of our faithful worship. And God's message is worth our faithful, careful attention.
- The benefit is already here in the book. But it does require some effort and faithfulness on your part to receive what God has for you in it.