

Christ Reformation Church

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A Faith that Works *The Epistle of James*

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (2:24)

“Living by Faith in an Unbelieving World”

March 29, 2015

Sermon Text: James 1

Scripture Reading: James 1

Introduction-

This morning we begin a new series of messages through three New Testament Epistles: James, 1 Peter, and 2 Peter. We will consider them in the order in which they appear in Scripture. James is thought to have been written in 40-50 AD, one of the earliest of the NT writings. 1 Peter is

thought to have been written about 64 AD during the time of Nero's persecutions, and 2 Peter shortly thereafter, just prior to Peter's martyrdom.

If you have an ESV Bible, it has this informative paragraph about James as a heading:

“Sometimes called ‘the Proverbs of the New Testament,’ the book of James practically and faithfully reminds Christians how to live. From perseverance to true faith to controlling one’s tongue, submitting to God’s will and having patience, this book aids readers in living authentically and wisely for Christ. Many have claimed that James and the apostle Paul differed on the question of faith versus works, but in reality the spiritual fruit that James talks about simply demonstrates the true faith of which Paul wrote. Their writings are complementary rather than contradictory. Possibly one of the earliest of the New Testament writings (A.D. 40-50), the book is believed to

have been written by Jesus' brother James (Gal 1:19)."

Alright then, first of all let's get our "James" straightened out. There are three of them in the New Testament:

- James the son of Zebedee, brother of John, one of the 12 Apostles
- **James the brother of the Lord Jesus** (and also brother then of Jude, author of the Epistle of Jude). This James is the author of the Epistle of James, not one of the 12. Later the leader of the church at Jerusalem
- James the son of Alphaeus, another one of the 12 Apostles

Here is the NT information on them:

1 & 2 James the son of Zebedee and James the son of Alphaeus

Matthew 4:21 And going on from there he saw two other brothers, **James the son of Zebedee** and John his brother, in the boat with Zebedee their father, mending their nets, and he called them.

Matthew 10:2-4 The names of the twelve apostles are these: first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; **James the son of Zebedee**, and John his brother; (3) Philip and

Bartholomew; Thomas and Matthew the tax collector; **James the son of Alphaeus**, and Thaddaeus; (4) Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.

Matthew 17:1-3 And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and **James, and John his brother**, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. (2) And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. (3) And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

Mark 3:18 Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew, and Matthew, and Thomas, and **James the son of Alphaeus**, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean,

Luke 8:51-55 And when he came to the house, he allowed no one to enter with him, except **Peter and John and James**, and the father and mother of the child. (52) And all were weeping and mourning for her, but he said, "Do not weep, for she is not dead but sleeping." (53) And they laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. (54) But taking her by the hand he called, saying, "Child, arise." (55) And her spirit returned, and she got up at once.

And he directed that something should be given her to eat.

Acts 1:13-16 And when they had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and **James** and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, **James the son of Alphaeus** and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. (14) All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers. (15) In those days Peter stood up among the brothers (the company of persons was in all about 120) and said, (16) "Brothers, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke beforehand by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus.

Acts 12:1-2 About that time Herod the king laid violent hands on some who belonged to the church. (2) **He killed James the brother of John with the sword,**

3. James the Brother of our Lord and Author of the Epistle

John 2:12 After this he went down to Capernaum, with **his mother and his brothers** and his

disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.

John 7:1-5 After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. (2) Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. (3) **So his brothers said to him,** "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. (4) For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." (5) **For not even his brothers believed in him.**

Luke 8:19-21 **Then his mother and his brothers came to him,** but they could not reach him because of the crowd. (20) And he was told, "Your mother and your brothers are standing outside, desiring to see you." (21) **But he answered them,** "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."

Mark 3:20-22 Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. (21) **And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."** (22) And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by

Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."

Matthew 13:55 Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And **are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?**

(Note: Jude/Judas is still another brother of the Lord Jesus and thus James's brother, author of the Epistle of Jude).

Acts 12:14-17 Recognizing Peter's voice, in her joy she did not open the gate but ran in and reported that Peter was standing at the gate. (15) They said to her, "You are out of your mind." But she kept insisting that it was so, and they kept saying, "It is his angel!" (16) But Peter continued knocking, and when they opened, they saw him and were amazed. (17) But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, "**Tell these things to James and to the brothers.**" Then he departed and went to another place.

Acts 15:13-21 After they finished speaking, **James replied**, "Brothers, listen to me. (14) Simeon has related how God first

visited the Gentiles, to take from them a people for his name. (15) And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written, (16) "'After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, (17) that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord, who makes these things (18) known from of old.' (19) Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, (20) but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood. (21) For from ancient generations Moses has had in every city those who proclaim him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues."

Galatians 1:18-19 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. (19) **But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.**

Galatians 2:6-10 And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)--those, I say, who seemed influential

added nothing to me. (7) On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (8) (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), (9) **and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars**, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. (10) **Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.**

Galatians 2:11-12 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. (12) **For before certain men came from James**, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

So there we have our 3 James all straight. This James, the author of the Epistle, was the brother of our Lord and later became a leader in the church at Jerusalem. By that time, James the

son of Zebedee and brother of John had been martyred.

God for a Brother

You noticed in several of these verses that James and his other siblings grew up not believing Jesus was the Son of God. Let's think through their family life a bit if we can:

It surely is reasonable to conclude that Joseph and Mary would have told their children many times about the miraculous events surrounding the birth of Jesus, their eldest brother. And yet we are told in the gospels that they did not believe it. In fact, the gospel record indicates that there was much resentment toward Jesus by James and the other brothers (sisters? None are mentioned...). Why?

Put yourself in their place. You grew up with the Son of God as your brother, in the same house, having to put up with all the rumors in the small town that would have been connected with the birth of Jesus. Plainly stated, *Jesus was a lot of trouble*. Later on He frequently stirred up trouble...stirred up mobs...and Mary (Joseph isn't mentioned again) and the Jesus' brothers had to go out on rescue missions, they thought, to get him back home and calm things down. They thought he was mad, in fact.

And what would have been the interpersonal dynamics of growing up in a family where your eldest brother was, in reality, *perfect*? Who was growing in the wisdom of God? Who was radically different from this world? I suspect they would have been jealous, annoyed, resentful, anything but believing in Him. Mary and Joseph of course were believers. But the other boys apparently resisted their testimony all those years before Christ went to the cross and rose again.

And yet, after the resurrection, here is James in faith, a leader in Christ's church. It is really quite remarkable. What mind-blowing transformation must have occurred in James' thinking that he had clung to for some 20-30 years, resenting Jesus, and then having his eyes opened to see that his brother really was who He claimed to be all along. Did James and his brothers see Christ risen? Little doubt that they did –

Acts 1:11-14 and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." (12) Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away. (13) And when they

had entered, they went up to the upper room, where they were staying, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot and Judas the son of James. (14) All these with one accord were devoting themselves to prayer, together with the women **and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers.**

It may well be that Jesus' family was among the 500 Paul mentioned –

1 Corinthians 15:6-8 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. (7) Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. (8) Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

James and Faith

With that background and context, we now come to the opening lines of James's letter:

James 1:1-12 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. (2) Count it

all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, (3) for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. (4) And 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. (6) But 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. (7) For 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, (10) and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. (11) For 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.

What is remarkable in these words is that the one-time, long-time unbelieving brother of our Lord opens his letter right up with this theme of

faith. It is faith that he once lacked and even opposed, but which now is in him powerfully. He professes God and the Lord Jesus Christ with his first words, urging believers to remain steadfast in this faith no matter what trials come their way.

In our day, this word “faith” is often cheapened by people who claim to be Christians. I don’t like the following kinds of uses of “faith” –

- The faith community in our town
- In my faith tradition, we....
- We must simply have faith

These words betray an empty, shallow, meaningless concept of faith that is really nothing at all. To be in the “faith community,” this notion simply requires that you “believe” and it really doesn’t matter what you believe. Mormon, JW, libertine, rank legalist, Buddhist, Muslim, Adventist, Roman Catholic, it doesn’t matter. The object of faith is left out. I consider this a demeaning use of the word “faith” in fact. “You knuckleheads out there who are foolish enough to believe your religious stuff” – that’s the “faith community.” It is a patronizing phrase. I reject it. I am not a part of the “faith community” in this town. I am and this church is a confessor of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, of the truth and inerrancy of His written Word and of the faith once and for all

delivered to the saints. So when someone invites me or our church to come a join in some event or meeting of the Tillamook “faith community,” I decline.

This faith of which James is going to teach us about, the same faith that was given to Him by Christ, taught to Him by the Spirit of Christ, and which lived in Him and persevered even in the face of intense persecution and hatred, refusing to deny the Lord Jesus Christ’s Person and Word, that is the faith we have, and it is a remarkable, supernatural thing that the natural man does not have and which he mocks.

James is going to speak to us about how this genuine faith:

- Perseveres and even rejoices in trials
- Empowers our prayers
- Is not deceived by the evil one
- Is implanted in us and is growing
- Bridles our flesh and tames our tongue
- Ministers to widows and orphans
- Does not show partiality to the rich
- Works the works of God and thereby “justifies” (ie, authenticates) our justification
- Fears God
- Produces the fruit of the Spirit and puts to death the deeds of the flesh

- Rejects friendship with the world
- Humbles us and rejects pride
- Leads us to love one another
- Entrusts our future to the Lord

Such are the lessons, the vital lessons, James learned and which he instructs us in. We will do well to listen carefully and let this earthly brother of our Lord teach us what it is like to be the heavenly brother of Christ.