

THE EPISTLE OF JAMES – SERMON 1

INTRODUCTION

James 1:1

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- The world is watching and waiting for the opportunity to label us as “just another hypocrite Christian”
- Sadly, many times we do give them legitimate reason to do that
- James is one of seven “General Epistles” in the New Testament
- The term “General Epistle” means that it was written to Christians generally, as opposed to individual churches or people.
- The Puritan Preacher Thomas Watson gave this advice concerning the Bible. "Read the scriptures not only as history but as a love letter sent from God to you"

I. THE AUTHOR

- A. There are at least three different James' mentioned in the New Testament, and there are times when it is not clear which James is referred to
1. James, the son of Zebedee and Salome, and brother of John (Mark 3:17)
 - a. Since this James was martyred around 42-44 AD, and the epistle was probably written after this, it is unlikely he is the writer (Acts 12:1-2)
 2. James the son of Alphaeus, otherwise known as James the Less (Mark 15:40)
 - a. Most of those who believe that James the son of Alphaeus wrote the epistle, also believe that it was this James who was in charge of the council at Jerusalem in Acts 15, and not James the brother of the Lord
 - b. That there is no reference to his apostleship would preclude an apostolic authorship
 3. James the (half) brother of our Lord
 - a. This is the most widely accepted author of the epistle
 - b. There is similar style and vocabulary used in his words in Acts 15

ACTS 15	JAMES
“greeting” (v.23)	“greeting” (1:1)
“Men and brethren, hearken unto me” (v.13)	“Hearken, my beloved brethren” (2:5)
“subverting your souls” (v.24)	“save your souls” (1:21)
“God at the first did visit the Gentiles” (v.14)	“visit the fatherless and widows” (1:27)

4. It is curious that James diminishes his fraternal relationship with Jesus
 - a. We are not to lay too much stress on carnal relationships, even to Christ
 - b. The privileges of adoption into God's family as his children and Christ's brethren by faith far surpass the virtues of a carnal relationship to Christ
 - c. Brotherhood to Christ consists not in emerging from the same womb as him, but in obedience to his heavenly Father (Matthew 12:48-50; Luke 11:27-28) which truth is at the heart of his epistle

B. Biography of James

1. James' Siblings

- a. We are told that the Lord Jesus had siblings, both brothers and sisters (Mark 6:3)
- b. The "Juda" that is named in this verse is probably the author of the General Epistle of Jude

2. James' Scepticism

- a. He was the half-brother of Jesus (Jesus not having an earthly father), yet though he spent so many years near Christ, he did not believe in Him until after His resurrection (John 7:1-7)
- b. Perhaps it was this close proximity to him that became a stumbling block to them (Mark 6:4; Luke 4:28-29)
- c. This was prophesied by David: *"I am become a stranger unto my brethren, and an alien unto my mother's children."* (Psalm 69:8)

3. James' Salvation

- a. After his resurrection, Christ appeared personally to James (1 Corinthians 15:7)
- b. James' eyes were opened and he now knew that this Jesus was not just his big brother, but the Son of God, the Messiah, and from that point on, James' life was forever changed (2 Corinthians 5:17)

4. James' Service

- a. He next appears with the disciples praying (Acts 1:14)
- b. Then he is described by Paul as a "pillar" of the Jerusalem church (Galatians 1:19; 2:9)
- c. In Acts 12 and 15 he is clearly shown to be head pastor of the Jerusalem church

5. James' Selflessness

- a. Rather than call himself a pillar, pastor, elder or apostle, he simply describes himself as "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1)

- b. The word translated “servant” is *doulos*, which is the lowest form of servant, on the level of being a bonds slave
6. James’ Spirituality
 - a. According to tradition, James was nicknamed “Old Camel Knees” as he was devoted to prayer
 - b. This might explain why prayer is heavily emphasised throughout his epistle (James 5:16)
7. James’ Stoning
 - a. According to tradition, in 62AD James was thrown down from the temple by the scribes and Pharisees; he was then stoned, and his brains dashed out with a fuller’s club

II. THE ADDRESSEES

A. Scattered Jews

1. This scattering of the Jewish believers is described in Acts 8:1, due to a great persecution against the Jerusalem church
2. Wherever they went, they preached the word (Acts 8:4)
3. It is believed that this epistle is in fact the first New Testament book to be written, probably written before the council at Jerusalem, seeing as there is no mention here of dealing with Gentile believers

B. Saved Jews

1. Notice the use of the word “brethren” or “brother” (1:2,9,16,19; 2:1,5,14-15; 3:1,10,12; 4:11; 5:7,9-10,12,19)
2. This helps to explain why the doctrines of atonement, propitiation, imputation, and other doctrines relating to the person and work of Jesus Christ are not in this book
3. It was written to saved people who needed to know how to live now that they were saved

III. THE ARGUMENT

A. Composition

1. The theme of the book of James is Practical Christianity
2. It has been called the Proverbs of the New Testament

B. Controversy

1. Because of James’ strong emphasis on works, this has led some people in history to question its validity as part of the canon of Scripture
2. Martin Luther called it “an epistle of straw”, and suggested it should be removed from the Bible

3. There is no conflict between Paul (Romans 3:28; 4:5) and James (2:20)
 - a. Paul is looking at the root; James is looking at the fruit
 - b. James emphasizes conduct more than creed
 - c. James is addressing the work of God IN us, rather than the work of God FOR us.
 - d. Together, both men are saying: "Works without faith are dead works; faith without works is a dead faith."

C. Content and style

1. Though James does not lend itself to a general outline, there are some prevalent themes in the five chapters that can be summarised thus:
 - a. Perseverance and pure religion (chapter 1)
 - b. Partiality and the product of faith (chapter 2)
 - c. Power of the tongue (chapter 3)
 - d. Pride and presumption (chapter 4)
 - e. Patience and prayer (chapter 5)
2. James utilizes a style called *duadiplosis* —the repetition of leading words for effect
3. James uses four Old Testament characters as illustrations — Abraham, Rahab, Job, and Elijah
4. His epistle has many similarities and allusions to the sermon on the mount
5. James makes use of similes and metaphors to illustrate his message; he is probably the most prolific illustrator in the Bible
6. James is forthright and plain speaking, and at times takes up the role of the prophet rebuking God's people for their sins

CONCLUSION

1. Though scattered abroad by persecution, these believers were not forgotten by God, and he would get his message to them
2. For believers in the 21st Century, as sojourners in increasingly hostile territory, the epistle of James teaches us how we are to live in this present world
3. In a day when "Christianity" is modelling itself more and more upon the world, rather than Christ, we desperately need the rebuking message of James to show us that pure religion is not conformed to this world, but is kept unspotted from it (1:27)