

Introduction to the Epistle of James

James 1:1; James 1:22-27
7/25/1999, Sunday Evening

I believe that God would have me to begin to expound the book of James in our evening services together. And so I have purposed, God willing, to take this book and go through it verse by verse and to set forth the message and its application to each of our lives.

The message of this book is desperately needed in our day, just as it was when it was written. James wrote this book to challenge the prevailing consensus that one could be a mere professor of Christ while living a carnal and a worldly and sinful life, and yet still have confidence that one was a Christian. Multitudes in this day and age in which we are living think themselves to be Christians when in fact they are not. And their ungodly lives prove their professions to be false. And so this book provides us with a very clear and practical test as to what constitutes the fruits and the evidences of genuine faith, and thus helps us distinguish true believers from false ones, both with reference to ourselves as well as with reference to others.

This book was apparently the very first book that was written that is in the New Testament. We tend to think, well, Matthew must have been written first, and Mark second, and Luke third, and John fourth, and on down through, like we would write a book, chapter after chapter. However, neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament are arranged in terms of the chronological appearances of the books, but rather in some sort of a logical order is the way in which they are laid out.

But the book of James was apparently the first book that was written in the New Testament era, being composed while the Church was still in its infancy. In fact, James speaks of the churches as meeting in synagogues. And of course we know that the early churches did, and then later on they separated out from the synagogues and had their own separate buildings. But we know that the early Church was largely Jewish in its makeup, that they met in the synagogues, and James' references to this fact indicate the early nature of the book. And so this explains his greeting in verse 1, in which he says, "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, Greetings."

And so there was still this mindset that the Church was composed of the twelve tribes of Israel, and those of course who were in the Church were drawn from those various tribes, and so he writes to them as still being members of them. So thus the argument for the early date of the book of James.

Now although the general theme of this book is very clear, the book is somewhat abrupt in its transitions, and moves quickly from one thought to another as he deals with a very wide range of problems that were present in the Church at this time. It's somewhat of a choppy book in that he deals with one thing, and he drops it, and he picks up another thing and deals with it and drops it, and picks up another thing and deals with it and drops it, and as a result it's rather difficult to develop an outline for the book of James. It is rather a conglomeration of exhortations arising out of the need to correct a wide variety of wrong attitudes and wrong behaviors in the early Church.

And so, while the general theme of demonstrating genuine faith pervades the book, yet there is such a wide variety of topics dealt with *in* the book, in such a choppy fashion, that it is quite difficult to develop an outline for it. I have seen numerous men hew and hack in an effort to come up with outlines with this book, and I have seen none that are satisfactory yet. If you know of one or have one, I'd sure be glad to see it, because try as I might and study as I do, I haven't found anybody that's come up with a satisfactory one yet.

So I will not attempt to set before you an outline of the book of James, or we'd have 72 subdivisions in it if I did because of the wide variety of subjects that are dealt with in rather brief fashions.

Well, this letter was not written to a specific church or a specific person, but rather it was a circular letter, intended for broad distribution to believers in general. When you look at verse 1, he writes it to "the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad." Now this is different than many of Paul's letters, for example, when he'll write to the church at Corinth or he'll write to the church at Ephesus, or the Apostle John, who will write to this individual or that individual in his second and third epistles. But this was written to the church in general; therefore, it is applicable to every believer, wherever he is, whatever his condition or state. So this book is not a book that is intended for a narrow audience, but the widest possible audience in whatever condition they might find themselves.

So what I hope to do this evening, then, is to give us a general introduction to the book and make some comments, and then, God willing, next week we'll begin the specific exposition of verses one and following.

1A In the first place then this evening, by way of an introductory comment to the whole book, I would like to talk about the purpose of the book—the *purpose* of the book.

Now a simple reading of the book of James reveals it to be an entirely different character than, say, the writings of the Apostle Paul. Paul's books are highly doctrinal teaching with great thoroughness [on] the various tenets upon which Christianity is built. And so we find Paul dealing with subjects of predestination and subjects of the Trinity and redemption, and the doctrine and structure of the Church at great length in his writings, in setting forth the doctrinal foundation for these truths.

But James, on the other hand, spends very little time in doctrinal instruction. He presupposes that his readers already have a knowledge of doctrinal truth, and spends his time in trying to convince them that this knowledge that they have will not really be of any benefit of them whatsoever unless it transforms their behavior, their values, their attitudes, and their speech. In other words, a Christianity that is not *lived*, even though it is thoroughly known, is no true Christianity at all.

And so James is dealing with a situation that we face in our own day—the problem of those who claim to be saved but whose lives are a practical denial of it in their ethical and moral and personal behavior, and the way in which they treat other people, and in the way in which they conduct their personal value system and their individual lives.

Jesus declared, in Matthew, chapter 7, verses 21 through 23: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out demons and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, you who work iniquity.”

And so what Jesus is saying is that a mere profession is not sufficient to have a safe outcome on the Day of Judgment. If one continues to be a worker of iniquity as the dominating characteristic of his life, Jesus declares this person has no personal relationship with God, and their profession of faith is spurious and it is false.

And it is precisely that mentality that Jesus spoke of in the Sermon on the Mount that James is seeking to deal with and correct in his readers. Notice, if you will, James, chapter 1, verses 22 through 27. In James, chapter 1, verses 22 through 27, He says: “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.” This sounds exactly like a reflection of Jesus’ teaching on the Sermon on the Mount. And indeed, many expositors make a very distinct parallel between the Sermon on the Mount and this book; and there are many similar characteristics and themes that run through the two discourses.

Verse 23: “For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a mirror. For he beholds himself, and goes his way, and immediately forgets what manner of man he was. But whoever looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. If any man among you seems to be religious and bridles not his tongue, but deceives his own heart, this man’s religion is vain. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”

And so what James is saying is that clearly there is a pure and undefiled religion that is to be practiced. And it is equally clear that there is an *impure* and a defiled religion that needed to be repented of and combated. In verse 26, he calls it a “vain religion”—he calls it a “self-deceptive religion.” And so it is for the purpose of distinguishing between this vain religious profession and this self-deceived person versus those who have true religion and true faith in Christ, as manifested by proper behavior and conduct, that James has written this book. And so James strives to correct the notion that one can be a saved Christian while living a carnal and disobedient life.

And so the theme of this book is that our lives must match our profession. This is a book that declares the necessity, the indispensable necessity, of demonstrating the genuineness of our faith by our actions. This is the argument he takes up in the latter part of chapter 2, in which he says that faith without accompanying works is not true saving; it is a dead faith; it is a faith that cannot ever redeem.

And so the genuineness of our faith, according to James, is shown by the way in which we deal with trials and temptations. The genuineness of our faith is shown by the way we deal with our temper and our tongue. The genuineness of our faith is shown by the way we deal with the poor, and the fatherless, and the widow. The genuineness of our faith is shown by the way we deal with and separate from the world and resist the devil. The genuineness of our faith is shown by the way in which we plan for the future. It’s shown by the way in which we deal with money. It’s shown in the way by which we exercise patience.

And so each of these themes are themes that James takes up in turn and deals with, and the unifying principle that ties them all together is that true Christianity has intensely practical implications in the realm of personal behavior. And to fail to carry out those implications in our *personal* behavior is to demonstrate that we are no Christians at all, but rather we are in fact hypocrites. And so he draws a clear distinction between true and false Christianity by drawing a clear distinction between the behavior that accompanies the one and is absent from the other.

Now we as Christians rejoice greatly in the merit and the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf. We revel in and we rest in the free grace that saves us entirely apart from our works. There is, in fact, no condemnation to those who are in Christ. But these precious truths of salvation by grace through faith, apart from works, must never induce us to think that because Christ has done everything *for* us, there is therefore nothing left to be done *by* us. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Titus, chapter 2, and verse 14, tell us that we are by Christ redeemed from all of our iniquity, not in order that we might go *on* in it, but in order that we might become a purified people who are zealous of good works, not a people who do *no* works. And so while our works do not save us, our works are the clearest demonstration and declaration that we are saved people, because the salvation that Christ brings transforms character, attitude, values, behavior, and speech, and if those transformations are not manifested in practical, observable ways, then he declares it is no true faith, and there has been no true salvation.

So as we study through the book of James, remember that what he requires of those to whom he is writing describes what the *normal* Christian life consists of. It describes what those who claim to have a true profession of Christ ought to be demonstrating in their personal behavior. These things are to be expected of everyone who claims to be a believer. It was written to the church at large, as we have seen, not to some select group of advanced believers. So the behavior he describes and demands is simply what is involved in demonstrating genuine faith.

And if you are sitting here this evening, and you want to know, Do I have genuine faith? Am I Christian? Well, just read the book of James and ask yourself if you do the things that he calls upon you to do, as the dominating characteristic of your life, and if you avoid the things that he calls upon you to avoid, as the dominating characteristic of your life. And if that is the case, then you may have assurance that, indeed, your faith is a genuine faith.

So as we hear these expositions, I hope each of us will be asking ourselves the question, Am I demonstrating genuine faith in *my* life in the way in which James declares that it ought to be done? Is my religion a vain religion and am I self-deceived? Or is my religion a pure and undefiled religion, one that will bring me a good outcome on the Day of Judgment?

And so this book, with its very plain language and very direct and clear statements, the very observable and measurable behaviors, should leave none of us in any doubt as to the answer to that question.

So this, then, is the purpose of the book. It is to separate the true from the false, the self-deceived from those who rightly understand the truth, with reference to their standing before God.

2A In the second place, then, we want to consider together this evening not only the purpose of the book, but the character of this book—the *character* of this book.

Now the book of James is written in the authoritative style of the prophets. When you go back and read the Old Testament, and you read the prophets and their proclamations and their statements, James writes very much in their style. It is full—a book that is full of commands and reproofs and warnings.

In fact, this book contains over 50 imperative verbs in the 108 verses that it contains. That is, there is an average of one command, in this book, for every two verses. That's quite amazing. And what he does is he says, Do this, do that. Don't do this, don't do that. Do this. Don't—You know, and it's just—it's full of commands. It's a very authoritative book. He is very blunt and direct as he writes. He does not attempt to please his audience. He does attempt to persuade his audience, but he is very forceful. He is very stern in his commands and in his warnings. He does not equivocate nor does he flatter, but reproofs and rebukes and exhorts them with clarity, with firmness, and with directness.

Now as we read this book written in this style, it serves to remind us very forcefully that we are a people who are under authority, and we are a people who are under the Lordship of another. That is, we are in a position, not of giving out commands, not of negotiating, but we are in a position of submitting. As Christians, we are under the Lordship of Christ. And though He is a very gracious Lord, He is a Lord nonetheless. And James makes no apology for the demands He places upon believers.

Many people want a religion where Christ does great things *for* them, but makes no demands *upon* them. And they want that kind of preaching, as well. They want preaching that tells them all the wonderful things Christ has done for them, and all the grace that He's shown out, but you start asking them to seriously obey and mortify sin and correct this specific behavior and that specific behavior, and all of a sudden, they are very unhappy.

And so, many people want a religion where Christ does great things *for* them, but makes no demands *upon* them. But James knows nothing of such a religion. He makes it very clear that certain things are *required* of us—things that are difficult, things that deny the flesh, things that demand self-control, things that involve self-denial—and he makes no apology for this. In fact, fourteen times in this book, he refers to “the Lord,” “the Lord,” “the Lord,” “the Lord”—over and over again, reminding people to whom he is writing that they are people under authority.

Now for those who gladly own Christ as their Lord, they have no problem with this. They could listen to the Word of God brought to bear upon their behavior, upon their consciences, and though it is convicting, and though it is exposing, and though it is demanding, they recognize that they're people under authority and they're glad to hear the voice of their King and to respond in a positive way to that. Others, on the other hand, become highly offended and begin to throw around the accusation of “legalism,” and all of the other words that are associated with that.

And so to many, this book is an offence. And the preaching of it will be an offence, because more than perhaps any other book, this book will test the reality of our submission to Christ in a very practical way that cannot be evaded and cannot be faked and cannot be diverted off into

theological discussions about obtuse subjects, that really have no application on one's personal moral behavior. That's why people like to talk about prophecy so much. You can talk about prophecy all day long and have very little application to one's personal conduct. But you start preaching through the book of James, and man, every week they're going to get nailed about how you ought to be living. And that's not because I'm some tyrant that wants to make you feel bad and run your life, but it's just simply God's own Word.

And so either you bow to Jesus Christ as Lord, in a very practical way, a very observable way, a very personal way—or you've got to give up your claim to being a true Christian. That's what James is saying. That's the message of his book.

Now it's easy to be a Christian in the intellectual realm. It's easy to be a Christian in the realm of orthodoxy, and that you hold to all the things that are in the Confession of Faith, and you can talk about them and you can discourse in the various difficulties with the various doctrines and the objections. James pushes all that aside, and he says, Do you control your tongue? Do you show partiality to rich people? When you make plans for your vacation, do you take the Lord's will into consideration? Do you pay all the wages that you are supposed to have paid your employees?—and a multitude of other set questions that, like, whoa—get right down to where the rubber meets the road. And this is where the reality and the demonstration of genuine faith takes place. This is where whether we have genuinely received Jesus as Lord or not is either proven or disproven.

In Romans, chapter 10, and verse 9, it says, "If thou shall confess with thy mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in thine heart that God has raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." And you see, it is the essence of Christianity that Christians own Jesus, not just as the object of their hope and trust for their salvation—although that is essential—but also as the Lord who runs and rules their practical, daily, moral choices and personal behavior in the way in which they treat other people. And so when Paul spoke to the Colossians in chapter 2 and verse 6, he says, "As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the *Lord*, so walk you in Him."

And so everywhere in the New Testament it is assumed that Christians are a people under authority, for that's what it means to be a disciple. A disciple is one who is a follower of another, who has submitted himself to that person's authority and carries out his commands and directives.

So as we go through this book, your submission to the authority of Christ and the Lordship of Christ is going to be challenged in a very personal and in a very practical way. And so I would urge you to purpose now to rise to the demands that discipleship places upon you, out of love and thankfulness to Christ for the salvation He has given you, recognizing that those who submit to Christ's lordship the best are those who are blessed the most. As Jesus said in John 13 and verse 17, "If you know these things, happy are you if you do them."

3A And that brings me then to my third introductory thought with reference to this book. Not only do we see the purpose of the letter, and not only do we see the character of the letter, but thirdly, consider together the author of the letter—the author of the letter.

Now we know, of course, that it was written by God. This is none other than God's own words. But it was also written by a man. And it is generally agreed among those who have looked into the subject, that the author of this letter is James, the brother of Jesus. Now there are three James which are mentioned in the New Testament.

First of all, there is James, the son of Zebedee, who was martyred in Acts chapter 12 by Herod. This James that was martyred by Herod in Acts, chapter 12, the son of Zebedee, was of that trio who were intimates of Christ, Peter, James and John. You've heard of that, right?—Peter, James, and John. These three individuals were the special intimates of Lord Jesus Christ. You remember that they were the three that He selected to go up to the Mount of Transfiguration with Him in Matthew 17 and verse 1, when all the others were left behind—Peter, James, and John.

And then at the resurrection of the ruler of the synagogue's daughter. You remember the ruler of the synagogue, his little daughter was sick and then she died, and Jesus shows up at the funeral, and they say, You're too late. She's dead. And He takes Peter, James, and John with Him into the house, and leaves everybody else outside—just the mother and the father and the four of them, Jesus and Peter, James, and John. And He raises this little girl from the dead.

And then, at the Garden of Gethsemane, when He was going through His final passion before His crucifixion, you remember that He left the disciples there in one spot, and He took with Him Peter, James, and John, and went deeper into the garden, and asked them if they would watch with Him and pray with Him.

So this James that was involved as one of the apostles, and as this special intimate of our Lord Jesus Christ, was murdered by Herod in Acts, chapter 12, in which it says: "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword." So there's no question about which James was killed. And his death was early in the history of the Church, and it is thought, given the date of the book of James, that there is no way that this James could have written this book, because he was martyred before the apparent date of the book of James.

Then, secondly, there is James the son of Alphaeus, who was one of the twelve apostles. And of him we know not much, other than the fact that he was known as James the Less, app— [recording interrupted] died, and among the twelve apostles, there being two James, they distinguished them by saying, he's James the Greater, and he's the Lesser, or he's James, the son of Zebedee, and he's James the Little, literally, is what it says—he was a small fellow in stature.

And then a third James that is mentioned in the Bible who is James, who was the Lord's brother. That is, this man was one who was born of Joseph and Mary *after* the birth—the virgin birth—of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is clear that Mary and Joseph had marital relations with one another and that they bore children in their marriage after the birth of Jesus Christ. It says, with reference to Joseph, in Matthew, chapter 1 and verse 25, in his relationship with Mary, it says, "And he knew her not *until* she had brought forth her first born son, and he called His name Jesus."

So while they abstained from procreative activity until Jesus was born, the clear implication of the passage is, after that, they engaged in normal marital relationships. The Roman Catholic Church, of course, has promoted the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary, because somehow they think that virginity is a more holy state than the state of marital fidelity, and of course the Scriptures know nothing of that. In fact, Mary would've been a terrible wretch, not some holy woman, had she not engaged in her marital responsibilities to her husband Joseph.

Now this man James, who was then a half-brother of Jesus, being the son of Joseph and Mary—Jesus being only the son of Mary and, of course, of God—this man being the half-brother of Jesus was one who was prominently known in the New Testament for both his character and his position in the Jerusalem church.

For example, if you look at Acts, chapter 12, the passage that I just alluded to with reference to the death of James, the brother of John, in verse 2, Peter of course was then captured and put into prison. The angel came and released him, and it says in Acts, chapter 12, that he, having escaped from prison by the supernatural deliverance of these angels, went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, whose surname was Mark, where many were gathered together praying. And you remember, he knocks on the door and eventually he obtains entrance after the confusion abates, and he says, in verses 16 and 17, “When they had opened the door and saw him, they were astonished.” Verse 17: “But he beckoned to them with a hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison, and he said, ‘Go show these things unto James and the brethren.’ And he departed and went into another place.”

So clearly, this is a different James than the James that was killed at the beginning of the chapter. And this James was apparently someone by this time who was exceptionally prominent in the Church, and that Peter wanted him especially to know, and then, by the way, tell everyone else. But *he* is the one who really needs this information—showing his prominence and his importance.

We see the same James again in Acts, chapter 15. And we have the Jerusalem Council in which the dispute over whether a Gentile must become a Jew before he can become a Christian is settled by this Jerusalem Council. And it says, in Acts 15 and verse 13, Paul having given his testimony, Peter having given his testimony, then it says in verse 13, “And after they had held their peace, James answered saying, Men and brethren, hearken to me. Simon [that’s reference to Peter] has declared how God did at the first visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for His own name, and to this agree the words of the prophets, As it is written (and now he quotes the Old Testament), ¹⁶After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; I will build again the ruins thereof, I will set it up: ¹⁷That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. ¹⁸Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”

Verse 19: “Wherefore my sentence is”—notice, here’s a guy who’s giving out a sentence—“that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: ²⁰But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, from fornication, from things strangled, from blood. ²¹For Moses of old time has in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day. ²²Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas”—and they wrote letters to them.”

Apparently, this James is presiding over this meeting in Jerusalem—this Jerusalem Council. When all the testimony had been concluded, he then passed his sentence as to what he believed the appropriate course of action was to be, and the apostles and the others all adopted and distributed it.

The third time we see this man appearing in this position of prominence and godly character of leadership, is in Acts, chapter 21. And here Paul is returning from his missionary journey, his third and last missionary journey. He is going up to Jerusalem. And it says in Acts, chapter 21, verses 18 through 25:

“And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said to him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law: And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that you are come. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and that they may know all these things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.”

So we see here that James is a central figure in Acts, chapter 12. He is a central figure in Acts, chapter 15. He is a central figure in Acts, chapter 21. He is spoken of by name; all the others are just referred to generically. And so it's clear that this man holds a high position of leadership and responsibility and authority and preeminence in the church which is at Jerusalem during this period of time.

Now to gain a little further insight as to who this individual is, turn if you will to the book of Galatians, chapter 1. The book of Galatians, chapter 1. Paul here is talking about where he got his message from—that he received it directly from the Lord. He wasn't taught it by any other apostles. And in referring to his trip up to Jerusalem, he says that after—verse 18—Galatians 1:18, “Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.” Now he's not necessarily saying here that James is an apostle. He's just saying, I saw Peter. I didn't see any other apostles, and I did see James, the Lord's brother—not indicating that he is necessarily an apostle.

And then we go down to chapter 2, which is a description of what happened at the Jerusalem Council, and he says in verse 9 of Galatians 2, “And when James, Cephas,”—that's another term for Peter—“and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go to the heathen, and they to the circumcision.”

So James and Peter and John, of course this being a different James than John's brother, the son of Zebedee—this being James, the Lord's brother—was declared here in chapter 1 and verse 19 to be the half-brother of the Lord.

Now, what do we know about this man's background? Where did he come from? Well, it's important for us to understand that James did not always occupy such a position of honor and such a character as he was revered with reference to in the passages that we have just looked at.

Notice, if you will please, Mark chapter 6, verses 1 through 4. The Gospel of Mark, chapter 6, verses 1 through 4. Now speaking of our Lord Jesus, it says of Him, Mark 6, verses 1 through 4:

“And Jesus went out from thence, and came into his own country; and his disciples follow him. And when the Sabbath day was come, he began to teach in the synagogue: and many hearing him were astonished, saying, From whence hath this man these things? and what wisdom is this which is given unto him, that even such mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, [now notice] the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and of Simon? and are not his sisters here with us? And they were offended at him. And Jesus said, A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country...”

And so this passage clearly declares that Jesus had brothers; Jesus had sisters. They were known to these people and they recognized this was just a common family. It’s a carpenter’s family. He’s a mere tradesman. Who is He to be having all of this authority and respect and giving out this demanding teaching, doing these miracles? We would expect someone of that caliber to arise from the higher ranks of society, and not from being a lowly carpenter. But the point I want to make here is one of Jesus’ brothers is specifically declared to be a man by the name of James.

Now how did Jesus’ brothers feel about him? Well, turn over, if you will, to John, chapter 7—the Gospel of John, chapter 7. It says in John 7, beginning at verse 1:

“And after these things Jesus walked in Galilee because he would not walk in Jewry [that is, Judah, the southern part of the kingdom], because the Jews sought to kill him. Now the Jews’ feast of tabernacles was at hand [and that was to be held down in Jerusalem]. His brethren therefore said to him, Depart hence, and go into Judea,”—that’s the southern region in which Jerusalem is—“that thy disciples also may see the works which thou doest. For there is no man that does anything in secret, and he himself seeks to be known openly. If thou do these things, show thyself to the world. For neither did his brethren believe in him.”

In other words, they were mocking him. And they were saying, Well, look, you know, if you’re really who you claim to be, then you ought to march down to Jerusalem when the whole world is gathered there for the Feast of Tabernacles, in which all the males of Israel were required, three times a year, to come up to Jerusalem, and the Feast of Tabernacles was one of them. The other was Passover, and the other was Pentecost. And so, three times a year, all the males had to come to Jerusalem to worship. And so he’s saying, Look—everyone’s going to be there. Go down there and do your stuff. Show the world who you are. And of course, they were mocking Him in saying this. They didn’t believe He would or could. And it says in verse 5, that specifically, “neither did his brethren believe in him.”

So who is this talking to Him? It’s the very people who are described back in Mark 6, and verse 3 and 4. Okay—they were His brethren and his sisters, one of which was James.

And so this James, who grew up with Jesus, was His little brother, in His home, and saw Him all these 33 years that He lived at home, James apparently being the next oldest. Jesus was born first, and then James, because he’s mentioned at the head of the list. So Jesus was always the big brother, and James was probably not far behind him in terms of his age, perhaps a year or so. And so he was unbelieving of Christ, as to his claims, and he was mocking of Christ with reference to his calling and position.

Now this attitude of James towards Jesus apparently began to change after the Resurrection of Christ. Turn in your Bibles, please, to First Corinthians 15—the book of First Corinthians, chapter 15. Now in this passage, we have a list of the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus. And in First Corinthians 15, beginning at verse 3, Paul says:

“For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures”—Okay. So now He’s resurrected. Verse 5: “And that he was seen of Peter [that’s Cephas], then of the twelve”—that would include James, the son of Zebedee, and James the son of Alpheus, who were of the twelve. “After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once”;—that’s the appearance in Matthew 28, verses 19 and 20, when He gave the Great Commission—“of whom the greater part remain unto the present, but some are fallen asleep. And after that, he was seen of James then”—once again—“of all the apostles.”

So apparently, Jesus made a personal, individual appearance to his brother James after his resurrection. And it appears that as a result of this meeting with his resurrected older brother, who was in fact his Lord and God, James was converted. And just as Paul was personally converted by a resurrected Christ, on the road to Damascus, in the same way, James was also converted by the resurrected Christ in some meeting of which we know nothing more than what is stated in this passage.

Now how do we now that he was converted? Well, turn over to Acts, chapter one. In Acts, chapter one, Jesus has just ascended up into heaven, the cloud has received him out of sight, the disciples are standing there, open-mouthed, looking up into heaven. An angel appears to them and says, What are you looking up to heaven for? Jesus is coming back. Go do your work until He comes back. And then it says, verse 12, “Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a Sabbath day’s journey.”

Acts 1:13, “And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode Peter, and James,”—there’s the son of Zebedee—“and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, and James the son of Alphaeus,”—that’s James the Less, James the Little—“and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, with his brethren.”

So apparently, the brethren of Jesus had gone from skepticism to gathering with the disciples, and participating in their prayer meeting immediately after the resurrection of Christ. So we see this James going from being second in the birth order, skeptical of Jesus. Jesus appears to him after His resurrection, and the next time we see him, he’s in a church prayer meeting. And he went from being an attender at a prayer meeting to one who was a leader in the church at Jerusalem. As Galatians 2 and verse 9 says, “He was a pillar in the church.”

Now church history—and these are secular sources now, or not secular, but not biblical sources. They are the writings of men not under inspiration—church history records that he became known as the James the Just—one who was a very clear and compelling example of what he taught to others, a man who lived a life of great holiness. We are also told that he was given the nickname of “camel knees.” And the reason why he was called “camel knees” is because he

spent so much time on his knees in prayer, he developed great big calluses on them. And of course, the kind of clothing that people wore in that day and age exhibited their knees, the men. And so consequently, it was clear to all that this man spent a great deal of time upon them.

And so he was a man who had an intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures. We see, for example in Acts 15, when there's a dispute in the church and everybody gives their testimony, he's the one who drags out the Old Testament passage and presents it to the people from memory, indicating his intimate acquaintance with the Scriptures.

He was also an intimate acquaintance with Christ, having lived with him for 33, or 30 years at least. Jesus began his ministry when Jesus was 30 years old, and so if James was 29 or 28 or 27, he had spent at least that many years directly in the home of Jesus and in his direct and personal presence.

We are told that he died a martyr's death, on the basis of reliable records—Josephus and also Eusebius—that he was thrown down off the pinnacle of the temple, and his brains beaten out with a club because of the wrath of the Jews against the Christians and their leader. And this was done shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D.

And so we learn several things about this man and about his life. We learn that he, like Paul, mocked and persecuted Christ until Christ sovereignly confronted and converted him. And it was sovereign grace that saved him. Can you imagine being under the witness of Jesus Christ for 27 or 28 years and never being converted? That shows, in fact, the hardness of the human heart—that you can be that long in the presence of a perfect being, who perfectly speaks the perfect word of God every time He opens His mouth—well, is a perfect example, and yet this man was unconverted until in Christ's own time, he appeared to him and regenerated his heart. And so it was sovereign grace that saved him, just as it was sovereign grace that saved Paul, and just as it is sovereign grace that saves us.

And so when you witness and people don't get saved, don't feel like that there's necessarily something wrong with your witness—because it takes a sovereign work of God to turn people from their stubbornness and from their mocking of Christ to conversion to Christ. And it takes nothing less than the resurrected Christ, working in their heart and regenerating them if they are ever going to be saved.

The second thing we see is that James's salvation brought about a radical change in his attitude towards Christ. Now he goes from mocking the Lord Jesus Christ and taunting him to show his stuff, to saying, in James 1:1, "James, a *servant* of the *Lord* Jesus Christ." Can you imagine going from viewing someone as your brother to being your God—to being your Lord—and you becoming, he says here, his bondsman? No longer is he a brother to Christ, he is a slave of Christ. No longer is he a brother to Jesus, now Jesus is his Lord.

And so he underwent this radical transformation in his attitude towards Jesus, and so it is with everyone who is truly saved. When someone is saved, they have no problem with saying, You know, I'm a slave of Jesus and I'm glad to be his slave. Whatever his orders are, I'm ready to carry them out. He is my Lord. I don't own my own life anymore. He owns my life, and I will follow and carry out what he has to say.

And so James is an exemplification of the sovereign grace of God working in the conversion of a sinner. He is an exemplification of this radical change of attitude that takes place in the life of someone who comes to faith in Jesus Christ, and all of those who are true believers in Christ are glad to receive orders, and they're glad to own Christ as their Lord and themselves as by his servants and slaves.

Thirdly, it is the true followers of Christ who are the true family of Christ. It is the true followers of Christ who are the true family of Christ. Jesus made a very interesting statement in the midst of his ministry, in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 8, verses 19 through 21. It says in Luke 8, verses 19 through 21:

“Then came to Jesus his mother and his brethren, and could not come near him because of the crowd. And it was told him by certain which said, Your mother and your brethren are standing outside desiring to see thee. And Jesus answered and said to them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God and do it.” Now Jesus was not repudiating the normal, familial responsibilities that he had as a result of a biological member of a covenant family. But what he was saying is that those who believe in Jesus, who hear his word and who do it, are just as much his family as his biological mother and brothers. And that no one has any advantage of intimacy to Christ over us just because they happen to grow up with him.

And so people take Mary, for example the Roman Catholics, and they exalt her to this incredible semi-God, as though she is some special and privileged person. Jesus says everyone who hears the word of God and does it has an equivalent standing with him in his eyes that his own mother does. And that is not to denigrate his own mother; that is to elevate all of those who are his true disciples.

And so if we look at this man and we think, My, what a high privilege he had. He grew up with Jesus. Wouldn't that've been neat? He has no privileges any greater than yours. Because you can know the Savior as well as he did. Because all that's needful to know of the Savior is recorded in the Scriptures. And those who read them and those who listen to his voice and words, who view his example and strive to be like him, can know Christ as intimately as James did. He has nothing over us. We have all of the opportunities and privileges he had. And it is imperative that we then challenge ourselves to achieve with those privileges and opportunities, that he *did*.

Here was a man who, in the first place you find him is at a prayer meeting. I would suggest that's a great place to start. And then, he went on from there to become a great man of God. James the Just—strive to be just in all of your dealings. Camel knees—he was a man who spent time in prayer. You can do that as well. He was a man who devoted himself to the service and ministry of the church. He was man who sought to reach out to believers and to spread the word of God to them.

You see, we have all of those opportunities that he did, and while God may not be pleased to put us in the position of significance that he was in, we can certainly become the kind of man that he was in our characters by following the instructions that he gives us in the book that he wrote. Because what the book of James is, is it's really a description of this man's character. It's a description of what he did and what he did not do, as this man who was the *pillar* in the Church. And if you would have James's character, simply follow James's instructions, because the universal testimony of the Church is that he lived what he preached. May the Lord help us to do that as well.

Shall we pray together. Father, thank you for the example of this man. Thank you for the book he wrote. Help us to realize, Father, that we are a people who also are under authority—a people who must demonstrate the reality of our salvation every week and every month, year in and year out, by the pattern of behavior in our lives. Father, help us to realize that Christianity is not an occasional spurt, but it is an ongoing flow in our lives. Father, I pray that the instructions James gives us will convict and will inspire us and will guide us into a proper pattern of behavior that is more like the Lord Jesus. Father, I ask that you would simply help us to hear and to do Your will. In Jesus Name, Amen