

JAMES: A MAN OF FAITH (James 1:1)

INTRODUCTION:

A person of integrity and consistent high character is hard to find these days.

One time there was a brand new lawyer in his brand new office on his first day in practice who saw a prospective client walk in the door. He decided he'd better look busy. So he picked up the phone and started talking real loud, "Look, Harry, about that business deal. I think I better run down to the factory and handle it personally. yes, I'm sure. No, I don't think 3 million will swing it. We better have Rogers from Seattle meet us there. OK. I'll call you back later."

Then he looked up at the visitor and said, "Good morning, how can I help you?" And the person said, "You can't help me at all. I'm just here to hook up your phone!"

A man of integrity is hard to find! Just look at some of our political leaders. What a mess many of them make of their lives and careers because of their lack of integrity.

Today I want to introduce you to such a man known for his integrity. He was a Christian. He was a leader; not a political leader, but a Christian leader. His name is James. He was known for his integrity. He was looked up to.

Today I want to start series of messages on the book of James.

This book is not one of the more popular New Testament books. It's been called the neglected Epistle. The persecuted Epistle. And even such a great Christian like Martin Luther called it a "right strawy epistle."

One of the reasons the book of James has suffered at the hands of critics is because it is so intensely practical. It speaks to very practical issues. It speaks to us where we live. James, the writer, is a man who insists on a "reality check" on our faith. If we believe, then we are to show it by our actions. He doesn't hesitate to step on our toes.

James lived in the first century. In his generation some called him James the Just, because of his steadfast Christian character. It seems that James' integrity was an exception in his day as well. James found himself surrounded by many whose

Christian profession did not match their practice. So in order to help his fellow Christian know how to live with Christian character and maturity he wrote what was probably the first book of our New Testament.

James was not always this strong Christian. This morning I want by way of introduction to the book of James to focus in on what changed James and made him a strong Christian leader.

Although there are 5 different James' listed in the New Testament, it is the studied opinion of most New Testament scholars that our James, the writer of James, was literally the brother of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 13:55 it lists James first among Jesus' brothers. He was probably the oldest, after Jesus.

(Mat 13:55 NKJV) "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers James, Joses, Simon, and Judas?"

He was born and raised in the same family as Jesus of Nazareth. His parents were Joseph and Mary. No doubt, he even bore a physical resemblance to Jesus.

We can say there are three stages in James' faith as noted by comments about him in the New Testament. Let's look at these three stages.

JAMES THE DOUBTING SKEPTIC

Our first glimpse of James in the Scriptures presents him as a doubting skeptic. When Jesus was on this earth doing his works John 7:5 says "...**For even his brothers did not believe in him.**" This included James.

Think for a moment about the early experience of James with Jesus. As young boys I'm sure they played together in the streets. They worked side by side in their dad's carpenter shop. They may have even shared a room together.

And Jesus was James' big brother! And Jesus never sinned. He always came when his mother called him the first time. He always washed his hands before dinner. He always picked up his socks. He always washed the ring out of the tub. He always went to bed when mom or dad said it was time. Now if you were James, that wouldn't endear you to your older brother. Not only are you the little brother but you have a big brother who never, and I mean never, does anything wrong!

And then that big brother goes away for a while and when he comes back he announces that He is the Son Of God, the Messiah sent from Heaven to save sinners and restore men and women into a living relationship with God. How do

you think James felt toward his big brother? Mark 3: 21 tells us, **“But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, “He is out of His mind.”**

And James held on to that opinion throughout his young manhood. Even though he grew up with him, somehow James just could not believe Jesus was that different than he was. He denied Jesus’ Deity.

The APPLICATION for us is clear. Just as for James there was an extended period in his life of spiritual confrontation and confusion with Jesus, so it may have been or is in your life.

In my life, I grew up in church to believe in Jesus. When I was a teenager I began getting away from church. By the time I enlisted in the army I began doubting what I was taught about Jesus. But something happened in my life, as it did in James’ life.

Even at the time of the Cross James was still a rebellious unbeliever. But something happened! Something happened to James that changed all that. For when you turn to the book of Acts you find...

JAMES THE HUMBLE BELIEVER

In Acts chapter one, we find James and the other brothers of Jesus assembled in a prayer meeting in an upper room. When it lists the persons present in that room verse 14 says, **“...and his brothers.”** James became a believer.

The question is, “What changed him?” What happened to cause this man who, during the life of Jesus denied His deity and mocked him, to now number himself among Jesus’ disciples?

The answer is found in I Cor. 15:5-7. There, Paul gives us a list of those people to whom Jesus appeared after his Resurrection. He tells us that after the cross, Jesus paid a very special visit to James, his brother. He writes that **Jesus...appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred...at one time...and.....then Paul singles out a very special appearance of Jesus....he writes...Then he appeared to James.....”**

What a scene that must have been! We don't know where or how Jesus appeared to him. We don't know what Jesus said to his younger brother at that time. But I'm sure it was a very emotional scene. A time where Jesus shared

words of love and understanding. It is quite clear that in that encounter with His Resurrected Brother, James became a Christian. The Brother became a Believer. The Skeptic became a Saint.

With all this background in mind I want you to notice now the deep significance of James' words in verse one. Verse one of James 1:

James, the servant the God and the Lord Jesus Christ...

James does not mention here that he grew up in the same home with Jesus. No claim to fame based on the fact that he had an intimate association with Jesus during his boyhood.

Why doesn't he say he is Jesus' brother? One reason is because he knows now that his real relationship with Jesus is not physical. It was spiritual. It wasn't made possible by Mary the same mother, but only by the Grace of God- the same Father. That same grace that God shows toward you in your unbelief and skepticism.

The APPLICATION for us? The keys to developing Christian character and integrity are meeting the living Christ and adopting a servant's heart toward him! Do you recall the time you first met Jesus as your personal Savior? If you have grown up in the church it is easy to be acquainted with Jesus and hear much about him. But to meet him personally when the Holy Spirit comes to your heart and opens it to believe. This is a life changing event.

JAMES THE CHURCH LEADER

The final account of James we find in the Scriptures shows him to be James James The Church Leader or James the Just.

As you read through the book of Acts you find that this man James becomes one of the most significant leaders in the early church. In Acts 12 when Peter was released from Prison, one of the men he sought out was James. In Acts 15, which was the first great church council, this man James chaired the meeting. In Galatians 1 Paul says that when he came to Jerusalem he saw only the Apostle Peter and James-the Lord's brother. (1:19)

As I said earlier, he was called James the Just. For he was known as a man of great integrity. A righteous man, honest and fair. The church historian, Eusebius, tells us that one of the nicknames he had was that of Camel Knees. Believe it or not, that was a term of affection. Evidently James was known for being on his knees in prayer so often that the people

said his knees became worn like the knees of a camel. So they called him OLD CAMEL KNEES.

(I have never been said to have 'camel knees,' although I have been accused of having 'chicken legs.)

The reality of James' faith was proven not only by his life but also by his death. Josephus, the Jewish Historian of that generation, tells us that in the year 62 A.D. this man James was cruelly put to death for his faith in Jesus. He died by stoning. The details of his death are vivid and extremely sad. James was willing not only to Live for Jesus but even to Die for him--This one who had been His Brother.

The APPLICATION for us -- To be a person of strong Christian character and integrity, you must be a person of faith, your must be a person of prayer, and you must be totally committed to live for Christ. This was James' example.

CONCLUSION

But before James was martyred, God directed him by the Holy Spirit to write this small book we are going to study called JAMES. It's been called the classical treatise of Practical Christianity. And it's theme can be summarized in one simple but life changing truth: Namely that it is not enough for you to profess a belief in Christ if that belief does not show itself in your life.

Real faith always produces genuine Christian character and work. The person who has truly found the way will genuinely walk in it.

At the first orientation class of a new Marine boot camp, there sat a frightened band of men with their heads shaved and no self confidence. The Stereotyped instructor then said, "Men, look on your right and look on your left. In 14 weeks one of those fellows won't be here." And in that particular camp, he didn't miss it by much. They started with 85 and graduated 42. What he was saying was that this training will thin the ranks! That if you have some unrealistic idea of an ongoing pleasure ride in this life through which you can become a person of true integrity and character-you better think again! 14 weeks later 42 guys with shaved heads graduated realistically seeing what it was all about.

Marine boot camp has a way of thinning the ranks out. James thins the ranks as well. As we go through the book of James he will thin out the ranks of us. It will test our faith to see if it is real faith or not by holding up a picture of Christian maturity and integrity.

John Wesley once said that the problem of problems is getting Christianity into the life. It's very easy to Talk the Talk. But it's not so easy to Walk the Walk. The pressure for us to compromise is constant. And yet it is because the stakes are so high and the consequences are so far reaching...that I challenge you to join with me on this journey through James as we seek to develop a faith that really develops Christian character and maturity.

Amen? Amen!