

Lesson 45

JAMES

Some things in the Bible are difficult to _____[a] (2 Pet 3:16). The content of James doesn't fall into that category. James is one of the _____[b] books in the Bible to understand. At the same time, though, it's one of the hardest to put into practice. Why? Because it's _____[c] demanding. It's no-nonsense Christianity for daily life. It's where the rubber meets the road on the matter of Christian duty. It challenges us to be "doers of the word" and not just hearers, and nothing is harder than _____[d] the Word.

WHO IS JAMES?

The author humbly identifies himself as "James, a bond-servant of God of the Lord Jesus Christ." That doesn't get us very far in identifying him. In the New Testament you'll come across _____[e] men named James. Obviously, the name James was popular among Hebrew men, no doubt because it comes from the Hebrew name "_____[f]" (recalling the founder of Israel). It's fairly easy to rule out three of them as the writer of this letter.

- James the father of Judas (not Iscariot) never appears in the New Testament except in Luke 6:16.
- James the son of Alphaeus was an apostle whom we know little about. If he wrote James, it's reasonable to think he would have called himself "an apostle" rather than merely "a servant."
- James "the Less" (or "the younger," Mark 15:40) may be the same as James "the son of Alphaeus." If he is or isn't, either way we know little about him as well.

This leaves (1) James, the son of _____[g] and brother of the apostle John, and (2) James, the half-brother of _____[h]. Though James, the son of Zebedee, was both an _____[i] and part of Jesus' _____[j] circle (along with his brother John and Peter), he was the first of the Twelve to suffer _____[k] when he was beheaded by Herod Agrippa I around AD 44 (Acts 12:2). This fact makes it very unlikely that he wrote James. That leaves us with James, the half-brother of Jesus, and most have identified him as the author since the earliest centuries of Christianity. It seems pretty obvious that the author was a well-known leader in the early church since he gives no other identifying names such as "son of so and so" or "the apostle," and James, the half-brother of Jesus was certainly a well-known and well-respected _____[l] of the early church.

WHAT WE KNOW OF JAMES' LIFE

Can you imagine growing up with Jesus as your brother? Talk about suffering from “second-child syndrome”—can you imagine living in the shadow of an older brother who never _____[m]? There you are in all your imperfection and there’s your brother who is God in the flesh! I’m sure Jesus never waded His _____[n] nature in the face of his brothers as they were growing up, but his brothers would have been very much aware that Jesus was the only kid in the house who was literally perfect and did everything right. But when Jesus grew up and began the mission that the Father sent Him to accomplish, He didn’t hide His identity as the _____[o]. What did James think of his brother’s claim to be the Messiah? Well, we don’t have to wonder. John 7:5 says, “Not even His brothers were believing in Him. And Mark tells us that on one occasion His family “went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, ‘He has lost His senses.’” So, clearly, throughout Jesus’ ministry James didn’t embrace Jesus’ claims. This probably explains why Jesus on the cross committed His mother’s care to _____[p] instead of His brothers (John 19:26-27).

But James didn’t stay in a _____[q] state. After Jesus rose from the dead and _____[r] to the Father, his brothers were gathered with the apostles and others while they _____[s] in the upper room and waited for the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:14). What explains this change in Jesus’ brothers toward him? What explains their _____[t] into believers? Paul gives the answer in 1 Corinthians 15:7. There Paul says that, after Jesus’ resurrection, He “_____ [u] to James.” Although Paul doesn’t specifically say that Jesus appeared to His other brothers too, it seems likely that He did so.

We next come across James in the book of Galatians. Shortly after Paul was _____[v] on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:1-18), he returned to _____[w] to meet the leaders of the church that he had been so viciously attacking. He specifically said he met “James, the Lord’s brother” on that occasion (Gal 1:19). Obviously, James was one of the primary leaders in the church. Of course, we also see his leadership in Acts 15 where James seems to be the “presiding elder” when a dispute erupted around AD 49 which threatened the _____[x] between Jewish and Gentile Christians. When _____[y] made his case to the leaders in Jerusalem, _____[z] concurred, and then _____[aa] stood up and supported Peter and Paul (Acts 15:13-21). James appears again in the book of Acts about ten years later (around AD 58). Shortly after Paul arrived in Jerusalem from his third missionary journey, he met with James (Acts 21:15-19) and James persuades Paul to perform a purification _____[bb] in the _____[cc] to prove that he’s not anti-Law-of-Moses. Though Paul was anti-Law-of-Moses as a means of

salvation and did not want the Jewish Law forced on _____[dd], he respected _____[ee] who still felt conscientiously compelled to keep much of the Law.

Ancient historians tell us that James continued to live and teach in Jerusalem, convincing many Jews and visitors that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Eventually, though, the anti-Christian forces of Jerusalem had enough of him, and Josephus reports that James was _____[ff]. Most believe he died in the early AD 60s.

A UNIQUE AND MISUNDERSTOOD “LETTER”

One interesting thing about James is that it’s a _____[gg] that’s not really a _____[hh]. Let me explain. James is a letter in form because it has a greeting, it refers to its readers often as “brothers,” and it identifies the author by name. But unlike a letter, there is nothing said about the recipients, there is no news given and there are no greetings or messages offered at the end of it. So, even though it’s a letter in form, it’s not really a letter at all; it’s another type of literature. Many scholars describe it more like a _____[ii] which was published as a letter. It’s basically a tract that gives _____[jj] instruction. He addressed it “to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad” (James 1:1). This means Jews who were living outside of the land of Israel. So, the “epistle of James” is a tract of moral teaching/instruction for _____[kk] Christians in general who lived outside of _____[ll].

Another interesting thing about James is that many people have not appreciated its _____[mm]. The great _____[nn] Martin Luther (1483-1546) didn’t like it at all. In fact, he called it “an epistle of straw” (which means something like “the letter of an emptyhead”) meaning it had little value because he couldn’t find the gospel in it. When Luther translated the New Testament into German, he couldn’t quite bring himself to toss it out of the Bible, but he did place it last because he didn’t feel it had the same _____[oo] as the rest of the New Testament. He wondered if it might have been written by an unknown Jewish individual who didn’t understand the Christian _____[pp]. Luther’s main problem with James was that it seems to contradict Paul’s teaching on justification by _____[qq] apart from _____[rr]. It seemed to Luther that James was a _____[ss]. That is, it seemed to Luther that James taught that one is saved based on their _____[tt]. Conservative Bible scholars today are convinced—as am I—that Luther misunderstood James when it came to the matter of faith and works. To truly understand the right relationship between faith and works, the book of James is critical. That’s a huge reason why we should study the book of James regularly. So, what exactly does James say to help us understand the relationship between faith and works?

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAITH & WORKS

The religious climate in our day and age has several interesting characteristics, and one of those characteristics is how it often reacts when you start talking about _____[uu], commands, _____[vv], and _____[ww] in the life of a Christian. When many hear those words—obey, law, good works, God’s commands—they give it a thumbs-down, then they cry, “Legalism,” and then they run away as fast as they can. They are quick to emphasize that following Jesus isn’t about doing this or that, or not doing this or that. You’ll hear them say, “Christianity isn’t a list of dos and don’ts.” Meanwhile, James says, “Yes, it is!” James makes it clear that, if you’re a Christian, you can’t just _____[xx] to the Word; you must _____[yy] it. If you don’t, James says your faith is dead (James 2:14-26). In other words, he says you don’t really have authentic faith at all if you don’t obey the Word. The person who has truly found the way will genuinely walk in it. If you claim, “I have come to Jesus Christ; He is my Lord and Savior,” James answers, “Then let your life give evidence of that truth. Let your outward acts reflect the inward reality. Justify your faith before other by your good works.”

Obviously we must be careful to understand properly and biblically this relationship between faith and works, and James challenges us to do that. His point is clear, and that point is that you can’t _____[zz] the two. Authentic faith _____[aaa]. Authentic faith _____[bbb]. Like the marriage between a man and a woman, faith and works have been joined together. On the one hand, James refers to faith 14 different times in his letter. On the other hand, his letter is filled with commands to obey. Out of the 108 verses in James, there are 59 different commands. _____[ccc] is everywhere. Again, genuine, authentic faith _____[ddd]. Genuine, authentic faith _____[eee].

Let me sum up James’ understanding of the relationship between faith and works with my favorite illustration. As a minister, I have found myself several times in the hospital room of someone when they take their last breath and pass into eternity. When that happens, nurses or other medical personal come into the room and check that person for a pulse, a heartbeat, breathing, or pupil dilation. The reason they are doing this is to see if the person is alive or dead. They know if life is still in that body, then there will be signs of life. But if there’s no life in that body, they know there won’t be signs of life. In a similar way, James is basically telling us that if there is real faith in our hearts, then there will be _____[fff] of faith, and those signs will be good _____[ggg] (i.e., obedience to the will of God). But if there aren’t any signs of faith—that is, if there is no _____[hhh]—then faith doesn’t really exist in a person’s heart. That person may _____[iii] faith, but real faith is very different from a mere profession of faith.

LESSONS FROM JAMES

- Trials and tribulations in life can actually _____[jjj] our faith and cause it to _____[kkk] (James 1:2-4).
- The highest value in life is not freedom from pain, but for a faith that _____[lll] (James 1:2-4).
- Seek _____[mmm], but understand that God doesn't give it instantly (James 1:5-7).
- True wealth is found in knowing _____[nnn] (James 1:9-11).
- Showing _____[ooo] in the church is a sin (James 2:1-13).
- _____[ppp] God's Word is a huge responsibility (James 3:1).
- Mature Christians are able to bridle their _____[qqq] to some degree (James 3:2)
- God is in _____[rrr] of life (James 4:13-17).
- _____[sss] is powerful (James 5:13-18).

KEY PASSAGES FROM JAMES

- James 1:2, 12-15
- James 2:1, 10, 13
- James 2:14-26
- James 3:6-8
- James 4:7-10
- James 5:8, 16, 19-20

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY

[a] understand	[ss] legalist
[b] easiest	[tt] works
[c] morally	[uu] obedience
[d] doing	[vv] laws
[e] five	[ww] works
[f] Jacob	[xx] listen
[g] Zebedee	[yy] do
[h] Jesus	[zz] separate
[i] apostle	[aaa] acts
[j] inner	[bbb] works
[k] martyrdom	[ccc] obedience
[l] leader	[ddd] acts
[m] sinned	[eee] works
[n] divine	[fff] signs
[o] Messiah	[ggg] works
[p] John	[hhh] obedience
[q] faithless	[iii] profess
[r] ascended	[jjj] deepen
[s] prayed	[kkk] grow
[t] change	[lll] endures
[u] appeared	[mmm] wisdom
[v] converted	[nnn] Christ
[w] Jerusalem	[ooo] partiality
[x] ready	[ppp] Teaching
[y] Paul	[qqq] tongues
[z] Peter	[rrr] control
[aa] James	[sss] Prayer
[bb] rite	
[cc] temple	
[dd] Jews	
[ee] Gentiles	
[ff] stoned	
[gg] letter	
[hh] letter	
[ii] tract	
[jj] moral	
[kk] Jewish	
[ll] Israel	
[mm] value	
[nn] Reformer	
[oo] authority	
[pp] faith	
[qq] faith	
[rr] works	