

58. Jesus in James

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The Book of James is so practical and down to earth that it was called as 'The Proverbs of the New Testament. It has a lot of practical illustrations and talking about doing and not just hearing.

This Book reminds me of product manuals. Grant that there are some products that we can easily assemble without any manuals, at the same time, some products require a thick manual due to its complexity. One time before I assembled a BBQ grill, I found its manual in the box. I tossed it aside and started to assemble it with a thought – "I have a college degree. I don't need no stinky manual." After I assembled everything, I realized that I put the wheels in the wrong place. Too late to change them.

If you are not willing to apply what we are going to learn from James, you are not going to learn anything out of it. Because the only people who can hear the Word and understand the Word are those whose hearts are open to the Lord by the Holy Spirit. Unless the Lord opens our hearts, the Word of God is a foolish thing to a human being.

A. AUTHOR

The author of the Book of James is not one of the twelve disciples. The disciple James who was a brother of John was killed by Herod A.D. 44. Jesus called them "Sons of Thunder." Some say that this Book was written in the early 60's. Another disciple James who was a son of Alphaeus, called "The Little". Neither one of them had the stature, nor the influence to write this letter.

We strongly believe that the author was James, a half brother of Jesus who thought Jesus was going crazy during the ministry of Jesus on earth as it mentioned in John 7:2-5. But later on he was called 'James the Just', or 'Old Camel Knees,' because he spent so much time on his knees in prayer which we can see in chapter 5. Within 10 years of time after the crucifixion of Jesus, "James the Just" spiritually matured in the Lord so much that he became a pillar of the Jerusalem church:

He was very influential both among the Jews and the Gentiles in the church.

Peter reported to him on his release from prison. – Acts 12:17

Paul acted on James' advice. – Acts 21:18-26

He was a very strict Jew himself, but was the author of the tolerant letter to the Gentile Christians. – Acts 15:13-29

He endorsed Paul's evangelism to the Gentiles, but was himself mainly concerned with the Jews.

His life work was to win the Jews, and 'Smooth their passage to Christianity'.

Throughout the Book of James, James quoted the Scriptures from the Old Testament 45 times.

According to Josephus, a Jewish historian of the second century, shortly before Jerusalem was destroyed by the Roman army in A.D. 70, when the Jews were, in large numbers, embracing Christianity, Ananus, the high priest, the Scribes, and Pharisees assembled the Sanhedrin and commanded James to denounce Jesus from one of the Temple galleries in A.D. 62 or 66. But instead, James the Just cried out that Jesus was the Son of God and Judge of the world. Enraged religious fanatics stoned and clubbed him to death. Until the last moment he was praying for them, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

B. THE THEME OF THE BOOK

The theme of James is **spiritual maturity**:

James 1:4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

C. THE THEOLOGICAL SIDE OF THE BOOK

Martin Luther once rejected the Book of James, because he said that "According to Romans, you will be saved by faith through believing that Jesus Christ is Lord, not by your work. But James talks about deeds." Later, Luther changed his mind and said, "James is helpful for Christians to grow." He advised the group of people who put together the Bible to put James in the back of the Bible with Jude and Revelation.

Faith is the root of Christian growth. But the fruit of Christianity is works in the Lord. How can you find true Christians? By their lives, by their works, by their walk with Jesus in day to day living.

James gives practical advice to us how to live and grow in the Lord. There are many people who go to church every Sunday morning, even Wednesday nights or Thursday nights. They listen to sermon after sermon, walk away with a head full of Bible knowledge, but they do not put what they learn into practice.

So churches become like giant playpens with a bunch of grown old, not grown up Christians who have been with the Lord for many years. Yet they fight with each other. They rattle and scream at each other. When they don't get their way, they pick up their toys and walk away with lips sticking out, "I am not going to play with you anymore!" They often use the Word out of context to get their way to each other.

You can have all the knowledge about the Bible. You might even be able to quote many more Bible verses than anyone in this room. You might even have better prestige in the Christianity realm than any of us. But if you don't apply what you learn in our life, the very knowledge will turn against us when we face the Lord in heaven.

The more we know about the Word, the more we are accountable to it. God does not cut slack and He does not lower His standard for the sake of our laziness and stupidity.

Christianity is like riding a bike on an uphill. Unless we put effort into constant paddling, we will end up in the bottom again. That goes the same for Christianity. Unless we put our Bible knowledge and doctrine into our lives constantly, we will backslide and end up in the bottom, because we are carnal and wicked.

The apostle Paul was not contradicting James in theology. While the task of James is not to expound the doctrine of justification by faith, as Paul did in so many of his letters, James' letter was not going against them either. Actually, because they both were coming from two different sides, they give us the full dimension of faith. Paul wrote about inner saving faith from God's perspective. The true seed of having faith is verified by the tangible fruit of saving faith. In other words, James' point is that biblical faith works.

D. THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The Book of James can be organized around faith's response to life.

1) Faith: Standing strong in trials and temptations – Chapter 1

First of all, James' own introduction of the beginning of the letter is very impressive because of its simple humility. If any one of us were a half brother of Jesus, wouldn't we drop THE NAME of Jesus here? This would have been the ultimate case of name dropping. But for James, he merely acknowledged himself as a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, nothing more. It doesn't get any better than that.

- The purpose of trials – v2-4

This is more than shallow advice to grin and bear it or positive thinking. He is telling us that there really is a reason to rejoice when hardship comes our way, because trials reveal the depth of our faith. Not for God to see, rather for us to see and so God can reconfirm to us that He is sufficient and trustworthy. Trials that produce patience bring forth the elements we need to be mature Christians if we persevere under pressure.

- Wisdom for the asking – v5-11

The other element of becoming a mature Christian is having wisdom from the Lord through His Word. We can stack up all the knowledge and information in our brains, but they don't make us to be wise, they actually can make us be an arrogant know-it-all. That would be the opposite of wisdom.

- A blessing for the persevering – v12-20

Trials brought by our Lord for our testing, however, are not to be confused with temptation that grows out of our own sinful desires. Our God is NOT an enticer, rather the Giver of all good gifts, including new life in Christ.

- A right response to the Word – v22-27

Have you met with people who would promise the moon? They are pacifiers. They do the talk, never follow through action. Ultimately, enduring trials and temptations come down to being "doers" of the Word. Let your "Yes" be "Yes," and "No" be "No."

2) Faith: Succeeding in serving others – Chapter 2

- Love your neighbor – v1-13

God's Word commands us to love our neighbor as ourselves. This includes avoiding prejudice or partiality.

- Faith and works – v14-24

Real faith produces authentic deeds. Saving faith is demonstrative faith. A person who is truly saved, as time goes by, he or she will show the evidence of one's salvation in his or her changed life. If a person who claims to be a born-again does not show any permanent difference in one's life, that person's faith needs to be questioned. The author James used Abraham, Isaac, and Rahab as his witnesses to tell us that works, while not producing salvation, are the demonstration of true saving faith.

3) Faith: Expressed through self-control – Chapter 3 and 4

- Taming the tongue and heavenly wisdom – 3:1-18

Before we go any further, let's all admit that we all are guilty as charged when it comes to not taming our tongues.

In v1, James warns his readers not to be too eager to teach the Scriptures, since teachers will receive a stricter judgment because we should know better.

The truth is that we all have a hard time controlling our tongues, but the deeper faith

in Christ we have, the lesser problems we will have with untamed tongues. Faith also produces a life of godly wisdom, not earthly ambition.

- Keeping desires in check – 4:1-17

Our selfish pursuit of personal pleasure causes division among the believers. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, James gives the ultimate counter punch against satan's temptation:

James 4:7 Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

While humility enables us to avoid slandering and judging others, arrogance and pride have no place in the Christian life.

4) Faith: Steady when distressed – Chapter 5

- Warnings to the rich, encouragement to the poor – 5:1-12

One way to demonstrate trust and patience in the Lord is to avoid careless and flip-pant oaths and, instead, let one's word stand on its own.

- Final exhortations – 5:13-20

James urges us to confess our sins and pray for one another and reminds us that no one is outside of the grace of our God.

These are the things we can use and apply in our lives every day and night, not only in the first century, but also in the 21st century. We can sit under the best teacher in the world and hear the best sermons and teachings every day and still not knowing anything. The prime example was Judas who betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Yes, he was practical in a worldly way temporarily, but he lost his soul eternally.

We need to keep our faith in our Lord and do what He tells us in His Word.