

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Introduction to James

James 1:1

Part 2

We have just started the study of this great epistle. We are still involved in an overview. We began last week by first identifying the theme of this epistle. I shared with you that I believe that the theme of this epistle is: TESTS OF LIVING FAITH.

The importance of examining ourselves and the importance of continuing to test ourselves in this area, as we noted last week, is not only seen in this epistle but all of the scriptures. Why is this such a dominant theme in the Bible? Because, without these tests, Satan can very easily lead people to conclude that they are, in fact, saved when they are not. Satan wants to lead people into a false sense of spiritual security. He wants them to believe that their salvation is secure even when it is not.

Many people, when they think of Satan, think of him as having a tail and carrying a pitchfork. This is the furthest thing from the truth. Rather, the Scriptures tell us in **2 Cor. 11:14** that he transforms himself into an angel of light that he might work his deceptions. Satan's primary tool is not the occult, but rather, false religions and counterfeit faith.

Certainly Satan is involved in all the major religions of the world. Just as Jesus in **John 8:44** told the Pharisees, who were Jewish religious leaders, that they were of their father the devil. We can also say the same thing about the leaders of every other false religious system. The lies that they are perpetuating do not originate with themselves but rather with the father of lies Satan, the great deceiver.

But Satan is not only active in promoting false religions but also counterfeit faith. He is not only spreading his lies outside the church but also inside the church. If we do not examine ourselves in this way, it is very possible that we might end up embracing a counterfeit faith, a non saving faith.

This is why, as professing believers, it is so important that true saving faith is verified by the way we live. By the things that we can observe in our lives.

In **Matt. 3** we find Pharisees and Sadducees coming to John the Baptist in order to be baptized by him while confessing their sins. On the surface this all seems so very good. But how does John the Baptist respond to them? In **V. 7-8** he says, **“But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? (8) Therefore bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance.”** In essence John was saying it doesn't matter what you may say, it is what you do that really counts.

In **John 15** it says in **V. 8** **“By this is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples.”** Did you notice what bearing fruit accomplishes? **“.. and so prove to be My disciples.”** Christ's disciples are known by their what? FRUIT!

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In Acts 26, when Paul is giving his testimony before King Agrippa, he makes it very clear when we come to Jesus in true, saving faith that it will make a difference in our lives. In Acts 26:19-20 it says, **“Consequently, King Agrippa, I did not prove disobedient to the heavenly vision, (20) but kept declaring both to those of Damascus first, and also at Jerusalem and then throughout all the region of Judea, and even to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God.”** (And of course this is in the context of, by faith embracing Jesus as their Lord and Savior and therefore have repented and turned to God in this way. What does Paul say?) **“... performing deeds appropriate to repentance.”**

Then again looking at Eph. 2:8-10, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; (9) not as a result of works, that no one should boast. (10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”** I finish with these verses to make it clear that we are not saved by works. But the truly saved, those who possess genuine faith, will produce works that are consistent with their profession, and because of this, all we have to do to ascertain that our faith is truly a saving faith or a living faith is to examine, or test our lives.

Since Satan is very active in the area of deception and seeking to lead people to feel a false sense of security, it is not surprising to see this extensive emphasis upon examination as we saw last week in the scriptures. And it is also not surprising that the focal point of that examination should be the way we conduct our lives as we have seen this week.

The tests that James will present to us throughout this study will help us to examine our own faith and it will also help us to see how we might be able to minister to other so-called believers who may not be living consistent with their profession.

Look at James 5:19-20, **“My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, (20) let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins.”** Notice it says **“if any among you strays from the truth.”** The person represented as straying from the truth is not identified as one outside the professing church but rather inside **“... if any among you....”** The **“truth”** is not talking about truth in respect to doctrine but truth in respect to life or in other words straying from the practice of truth. We will see clearly that this is the focus of this epistle. And what happens if we are able to turn a so-called brother from a lifestyle where truth is not practiced? We **“... will save his soul from death.”** We will save **“his soul,”** not his body, but his soul from death. Why? Because before being exposed as an unsaved person by the way he lived, he thought that he was saved. Not only will the study of this epistle help us to discern our own true standing before the Lord but, hopefully, it will help us in ministering to others. As I shared with you last week, the goal of this study will be when it is concluded that everyone will have had the opportunity to examine themselves in light of this teaching. And my hope is that because of this examination there would not be a single individual within this congregation that Satan will have lulled into a false sense of security, thinking that they are saved when they are not.

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Let us again look at **James 1:1** and continue our overview: **“James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.”**

Last week we concluded that the James who wrote this epistle was James the brother of Jesus. He knew a great deal about Jesus. He knew all the intricate details of Jesus' life. He knew all about Jesus but during Christ's earthly life he never knew Him. James the brother of Jesus was not a follower of Christ during his earthly ministry. He never knew Him as his Lord and Savior he only knew Him as his older brother who happened to do miracles.

This is clear from **John 7:1-5**, **“After these things Jesus walked in Galilee; for He did not want to walk in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill Him. (2) Now the feast of the Jews, the feast of booths was at hand. (3) His brothers** (from Matt. 13:55-56 we learn that His brothers were named James, Joses, Simon, and Judas; these brothers.....) **therefore said to Him, “Depart from here, and go into Judea, that your disciples also may behold your works which You are doing.** (What works?) They are referring to miraculous works. Why would they encourage Him to do this? They go on to say. **(4) For no one does anything in secret, when he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.”** They are encouraging Him to go into Jerusalem to make a name for Himself. It was as if they were seeking to manage a stage act. But how do we know that they did not accept Jesus as more than just a miracle worker? How do we know that they did not accept the fact that Jesus was in fact their Messiah, their Lord and their Savior? Because of **Verse 5**, **“For not even His brothers were believing in Him.”** They had missed the point of the miracles. And certainly this included James.

But things radically changed for James and his brothers. Look at **Acts 1:14** this passage records for us a gathering of Christ's disciples shortly after his ascension in Jerusalem and look who is included among them **“These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.”**

So what happened? The resurrection happened!! James was converted after the resurrection of Jesus. In **1 Cor. 15:7** James is listed as one of those to whom Jesus appeared after he had risen from the dead. It would appear that it was only then that he came to faith and, apparently through James, that the other brothers of Jesus also came to faith. And this is why we see James and the other brothers of Jesus in the upper room waiting for the descent of the Spirit of God and the birth of the church.

What kind of man was James the brother of Jesus?

Let us look first at his personality. He had a forceful personality. His sentences in the book are very short, very forceful, and direct. He is different from Paul in this regard. Paul brings up an issue and he has to explore it thoroughly. He has to cover every base, not James. He just blasts the target and moves on.

In this short epistle there are 50 imperative form verbs. James is black and white. He is like John in this way. John is black and white about concepts. James is black and white in terms of applications. John is black and white about theological issues. James is black and white about matters of life.

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Now let us look at his spirituality. When we look in this epistle we see a man who is deeply spiritual. In fact he was called in history “James the righteous” or “James the just.” They said that he was so holy that his knees were like the knees of camels because he spent so much time in prayer. His humility is seen in the way he introduces himself in this epistle. Look again at the first few words of the first verse, **“James, a bondservant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ”** He might have said **“James, the brother of Jesus”** but, he only wanted to be identified as the servant of Jesus. He has very strong convictions. He does not deal with exceptions. Yet he has great empathy for poor people. He is righteously angry toward anyone who abuses the poor. He has no tolerance of those who show partiality toward people for personal gain. He has great sensitivity toward unconverted Jews and their particular sensitivities. His courage can be seen by the fact that he died as a martyr. Tradition tells us that he was stoned to death by the Jews. James was a spiritually amazing man. He must have been, to rise to the place of prominence that he had in the early church.

Let us look at his ministry. He was not simply a leader in the church. He was a respected and effective leader within the church. In fact, he was the primary leader in the Jerusalem church.

In **Acts 9:26-29**, we see Paul visiting Jerusalem only four years after Pentecost. And according to **Gal. 1:19-20** who does he meet? Only Peter and James the brother of Jesus. This is amazing. Five years before this particular period of time, James the brother of Jesus was an unbeliever. He was not even one of Christ’s followers. But now we see him having risen to a place of obvious prominence in the early church. How did he get there? Very much like any of you would get quickly to a place of prominence in this church.

He obviously was viewed as a man committed to the Lord and His Word and demonstrated a depth of maturity in relationship to both.

He obviously was a man committed to the congregation and it’s needs.

But there is more. In **Acts 12** after the birth of the church, Peter was miraculously delivered from prison and when he had finally gained entrance into a group of believers that had been praying for him what did he tell them? In **V. 17** **“.... report these things to James and the brethren.”** This incident took place approximately 10 years after the birth of the church.

But this is not all. There is still more. In **Acts 15**, we not only have the opportunity to see him once more identified as a leader in the church, but We have the opportunity to see him functioning in this leadership role in **Acts 15**. In this chapter, what has become known as the Jerusalem counsel was meeting. Paul and Barnabas had come from Antioch to give a report about a problem they were having among the Jewish Christian community about the place of the Law in Gentile evangelism. After hearing everyone who had something to say, it says beginning in **V. 13** **“And after they had stopped speaking, James answered, saying, “Brethren, listen to me. (14) Simeon has related how God first concerned Himself about taking from among the Gentiles a people for His name. (15) And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written,**

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(16) After these things I will return, and will rebuild again the tabernacle of David which has fallen, and I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it, (17) In order that the rest of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,' (18) says the Lord, who makes these things known from of old. (19) Therefore it is my judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, (20) but that we write to them that they abstain from things contaminated by idols and from fornication and from what is strangled and from blood. (21) For Moses from ancient generations has in every city those who preach him, since he is read in the synagogues every Sabbath.” This response avoids the problem of legalism which would require Gentile converts to be circumcised and it also avoids a total disregard for Jewish sensitivities on the part of the Gentile converts when he encourages them to abstain from things contaminated by idols, from fornication, from things strangled and from blood. This incident took place approximately 50 AD. In fact most people put the writing of this epistle by James before or about 50 AD.

But we are not finished yet with James. We see James again in **Acts 21** when Paul comes back to the church in Jerusalem with a gift of money from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia. Once again we see James very much in a position of leadership. Let us read **Acts 21:17-18** **“And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. (18) And now the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present.”**

This took place nearly 23 years after Pentecost. James ascended to leadership in the church at Jerusalem very quickly, not because he was a spiritual slouch but because of his spiritual depth. And he remained in leadership in the church at Jerusalem because of his spiritual depth. James was a holy man, a godly man and man of great prominence and of great power in the early church. Recognized and respected by the apostles and those who were of the highest spiritual caliber.

CONCLUSION

AND WHY IS THIS VERY SPECIAL MAN WRITING THIS BOOK SO THAT WE MIGHT NOT BE DECEIVED? THAT WE MIGHT, THROUGH WHAT HE WRITES, KNOW THAT WE ARE IN POSSESSION OF THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE, AND THAT THROUGH MINISTERING THE TRUTHS OF THIS BOOK TO OTHERS WE MIGHT, PERHAPS, BE USED IN SAVING THE SOUL OF SOMEONE WHO MIGHT HAVE, WITHOUT THAT MINISTRY, BE RESTING IN A FALSE CONFIDENCE.