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“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20).

A Writer of Faith

Central Truth: God uses faithful believers to spread His truths.

L366. Date: June 1994. **Text:** James 1:1; John 7:3-6; Matthew 13:55; Galatians 2:9-12; I Corinthians 15:7. **Topic:** Faith: Of Believers; James.

The twentieth book in the New Testament is entitled, “The Epistle of James.” It is the most practical and down-to-earth of all the New Testament epistles. One expositor has called it “Christianity in Shoe Leather.” It is a delightful “do-it-yourself” handbook on the Christian life.

The message of The Epistle of James can be summed up in this statement: “Faith without works is dead” (James 2:26). From that premise the writer shows how practical the Christian faith is when applied to the affairs of daily life.

We need that kind of instruction today. It is possible to be content with knowing the principles of our faith without applying those principles to daily life. James insists that is a life of self-deception (James 1:22). So let us be ready for self-examination and reformation of conduct as we integrate true faith with everyday practical experience.

James the Brother

He is called James in the English language. He is called *Iakobos* in the Greek language. He was called *Iakob* (Jacob) in the Hebrew language. What do we know about this man? He introduces himself as “*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*” (James 1:1). But that still leaves a problem of identification.

The New Testament refers to five men who were called James: James, the “brother” [some translators say father] of an apostle called Jude (Luke

6:16); James, the Son of Alphaeus, a member of the twelve apostles (Matthew 10:3); James, who is called “James the Less,” meaning he was younger [some believe that this James was the same as the son of Alphaeus] (Mark 15:40); James, the brother of John, the son of Zebedee (Matthew 10:2); and James, the half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55). Which of those men was the writer of this epistle? New Testament scholars agree that the writer was James, the son of Joseph and Mary by natural conception and a half-brother of Jesus. James was related to Jesus by blood.

But James was an unbelieving brother during Jesus' ministry. None of Jesus' brothers believed on Him until after His resurrection. At one point they encouraged Him to go to Jerusalem for the feast of tabernacles and declare himself as Messiah. “No one who wants to be known openly does his work secretly,” they insisted. But their words were based on their unbelief of His claims (John 7:2-5). They may have wondered, even if they did not express it in words about the possibility that He was demon possessed. Some other people thought so (Mark 3:21, 22).

James became a converted brother. We do not know when he accepted Jesus as Messiah/Savior. It may have been when Jesus appeared to him after His resurrection (I Corinthians 15:7). James became a Christian and a leader of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:13). Acts 15 reports on a great council of the believers in Jerusalem. After Peter, Barnabas, and Paul had addressed the assembly, James spoke (verses 7-21). His recommendation was adopted verbatim by the assembly and passed on to believers everywhere (verses 19-29).

James the Servant

He identifies himself as “the servant (*doulos*, bond slave) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (James 1:1). Note his humility. There is no mention of his physical relationship to Jesus, though that might have given him greater esteem in the eyes of some. It could have been his “claim to fame” among his fellow believers. James did not call himself the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ, but the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. That was the only claim to fame he needed.

Note the spirit of James. He had no jealousy of Barnabas, Paul, or Peter. He took no pride in the fact that He was “pastor of the apostles.” His influence among the brethren was based on his ministry for God, not his blood relationship to Jesus. It was enough that he was a servant of God who has revealed himself in His only begotten Son, Jesus, who was James' half-brother. What a spirit! O that it might be seen in each disciple of Jesus

today.

James the Writer

James was an inspired writer. He was one of those whom Peter described as “holy men of God who *“spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost”* (II Peter 1:21). His writings are included in the evaluation of the apostle Paul: *“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”* (II Timothy 3:16).

Some have questioned this epistle because of the absence of an evangelistic emphasis. There is no reference to atonement, salvation, security in Christ, and other foundation principles of our faith. But that does not lessen its inspiration or importance. James' purpose for writing determined the emphasis of his content.

James was writing to *“the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad”* (James 1:1). He called them *“my brethren”* (James 1:2) and referred to *“the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory”* as if they shared that faith (James 2:1). We conclude, therefore, that the original recipients of this epistle believed in Jesus. The purpose of the epistle is not to settle them in the doctrines of the faith (as is the purpose of Paul's epistles). James knew that, as disciples who were scattered abroad among the pagans, they would have particular temptations to compromise their lifestyle even if they kept their doctrines pure. He wrote practical admonitions to assist them in putting their faith into practice. Thank God for this practical epistle.

James was a graphic writer. Students of literature should study the style of this man. He could express a concept more clearly in a brief illustration than any writer I have read in sacred or secular literature.

Notice the graphic reference to shifting shadows (1:17), a mirror (1:22-24), a bit in the mouth of a horse (3:3), a rudder steering a ship (3:4), and water from the spring and fruit from the tree (3:9-12). What writing have you read which puts such clear pictures in such few words? The literary quality of the epistle of James is unexcelled in ancient or modern literature.

James was a practical writer. His book applies your faith to the situations you face day by day. Do you face difficulties in life? Then read his discussion of faith in the midst of trials and temptations. Do you have a problem living by the principles your faith teaches? Then read his comments about hearing the Word and doing it. Do you have a problem with any type of prejudice? Then read his comments on showing favoritism. Do you find it easier to believe than to obey? Then read his evaluation of faith and works.

Do you have a problem saying things you should not and not saying things you should? Then read his warnings about controlling your speech. Do you have a tendency to lower your standards so that they are not much different from the society around you? Then read his warnings about worldliness. Do you tend to plan for the future without consulting the will of God? Then read his comments about leaving God out of your plans. Do you sorrow over the oppressed people in human society? Then join his grief in speaking of social injustice. Do you wonder about the power of prayer and have needs which should be taken to God? Then read his encouraging words about the power of the prayer of faith. That is a long list, but it is only a few of the issues dealt with in this blessed epistle of James.

James the Example

We will study the epistle of James for thirteen weeks, seeking to understand the principles of Christian life that are set forth therein. But we will do more than seek a mental challenge. We will find how to apply those principles to life. One way is to look at James as an example of a Christian lifestyle. Here are some of the things he teaches us by word and by example. Develop a spirit of humility. Remember that James was the pastor of the apostles and half-brother of Jesus. But he called himself a “bond slave” of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. Humility is shown in his relationships with the brethren. At the conference in Jerusalem (Acts 15), Peter spoke first; Barnabas and Paul spoke next. Those who insisted that Jewish circumcision was essential to Christian conversion were given the opportunity to speak. Only when all others had spoken did James speak. He knew how to prefer his brethren above himself. Is that a lesson you need to learn and put into practice?

Show loving concern for all people in need. The epistle of James was addressed to those who were “*scattered abroad.*” They were Jewish Christians living in the midst of Gentile paganism. They could expect understanding and help from neither Jew nor Gentile. Jews rejected them for their faith in Jesus as the Messiah. Gentiles rejected them because they were Jews. James' heart went out to them, as the spirit of his epistle shows. He was a man with a “pastor's heart,” even for those outside his congregation in Jerusalem. Such a concern shows the love of Jesus.

Make your faith practical in daily life. It is said, “Some people are so heavenly minded that they are of no earthly good.” But faith is to be practical or it is not true faith.

What difference does your faith make when you face trials in the areas

of health, finances, social relations, etc.? How does your faith move you to obey your Lord? How does your faith keep you humble when you feel pride rising in your spirit or feel insulted because your best efforts were not recognized and praised? James' epistle shows how to apply your faith to your daily life.

Have a reputation for piety. If you lived according to the principles in this epistle of James, your life would be blameless. James followed those principles. He was afterwards called “James the Just” because of his exemplary lifestyle. That is what your life will be like as you follow them. He was said to have “camel knees” caused by kneeling for such long periods of prayer.

God's people need to practice piety. They need to be known as people who “practice what they preach.” James teaches us to do that in this brief, five-chapter epistle. Here is an epistle that is worth reading over and over again. Here is a man worth knowing, a man who can direct you in Christian living. By reading one chapter of this epistle each day you can read it through each week during this thirteen-week study. You will come from it ready to live out the principles of your faith.

Questions for Discussion

1. Why was James only the half-brother of Jesus?
2. How do you think he came from unbelief to faith in Jesus?
3. How does he write of his relationship with Jesus?
4. Why did he address the epistle to those mentioned in James 1:1?
5. What practical subjects does he deal with in the epistle?
6. How does James teach you to be humble?
7. How can you make a practical application of your faith in trials?
8. How does James teach you to be reverent?
9. Why do you accept such a practical book as God's Word to you?
10. How can you develop a reputation for piety as James had?