

- When you were growing up, didn't your parents say the weirdest things? They would say things like:
 - "Close the door! You'll let the bugs in."
 - "Close your mouth when you chew. Were you raised in a barn?"
 - "Does that mean that if they jumped off a bridge you would jump off a bridge?"
 - "Stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about."
 - "Money doesn't grow on trees you know."
 - "Your face is going to freeze that way."
 - "When I was your age, . . ."
 - "You'll live."
 - "There are starving people in Africa who would gladly eat your dinner."
 - "Don't make me pull this car over."
 - I mean, really? Could it get any cornier?
 - And then, you grew up. You had kids. And one day, your child did something and you spoke without even thinking. And you were horrified to hear that the words coming out of your mouth were the exact same words your parents used.
 - You thought, "I'm my mother!" or "I'm just like my dad."
 - As much as we might say, "I will never be like them" we often end up saying and doing the things our parents did when we get older. This is true whether you admired them, hated them, wanted to be like them or wanted to be nothing like them.
- Let me take this one step further. What about your siblings?
 - Did you say what your brother said? Do you want to be exactly like your sister?
 - When we think of our siblings, we know all about them. You can't hide stuff from your siblings. You have many memories of your sibling(s).
 - You know when you got in trouble together. You remember when they supported you when everyone else was picking on you. You remember when they picked on you. You remember the hurts when they ignored you, or went off with their friends and left you alone. You remember that time when they blamed you and it was their fault. You remember the great times you had on the road trip, or playing together, or _____.
 - So whether we love and get along with our siblings or not, most of us view them both positively and negatively.
- Let me tell you about a young man named Jacob. He was the second oldest in a large family. The most frustrating part of being Jacob was not just that he was the second oldest in a culture that valued the oldest, but that his older brother was just so . . . good. He never wanted to participate in the stuff that got Jacob in trouble.
 - It was irritating. He never got blamed for anything. He was mom's favorite. He worked in dad's business. Part of him was glad when his older brother finally moved out.
 - The problem was that even then, it was embarrassing. He was a blue collar tradesman, and yet he acted like he was a university trained guy. He began to get increasingly popular and famous, which still bothered Jacob, because his brother had no right to be famous.
 - All in all, Jacob wanted to having very little to do with his older brother.
 - Jacob, also named James, was the second oldest child in a famous family, a family you know well. The mother's name was Mary, father was Joseph and his famous brother, whom he wanted to have little to do with, was Jesus.

- We are starting this week to study a book, a letter really, written by James, the brother of Jesus. Today, I want to set up our journey.
- Not only is this book an unbelievably practical book, it is, in my mind, one of the most convincing reasons for being a follower of Jesus. This letter shows what James ended up becoming, and in order for that to happen, something out of this world had to have occurred.
- Let's look a little more deeply at the author.

I. Who was James?

- This is literally one of the most amazing sentences in the entire bible.

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

- We actually get no other information about the writer from the actual letter.
- There were a number of New Testament personalities named James, but only three are candidates for the authorship of this book.
- At first glance, we might think it was James the son of Zebedee, one of the disciples of Jesus. The problem was that he died in AD 44, too early to have been the author.
- The second is another disciple of Jesus, James the son of Alphaeus. The problem is that there is no evidence or tradition that would lead you to think he is the author.
- Yet there does seem to be a bunch of evidence that James, the brother of Jesus (also called James the Just) was most likely candidate.
- But it did not start out this way.

Matthew 13:53 When Jesus had finished these parables, he moved on from there. 54 Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed.

"Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. 55 "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas?"

- That's what other people thought of Jesus, knowing his parents and siblings. But what did his siblings think?

Mark 3:20 Then Jesus entered a house, and again a crowd gathered, so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. 21 When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

- He was teaching as a Rabbi and claiming to be equal to God. His brothers thought he was crazy, just like you and I would if our brother or sister said this kind of thing. You would go get them too to keep them out of the insane asylum.

John 7:3 Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. 4 No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." 5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.

- While Jesus was ministering, his brothers were not part of the group that followed him. And then something happened. Something that changed James view utterly.
- This is why this is the most convincing argument. What would it take for you to write a letter referring to your brother as the "Lord Jesus Christ"
- It would have to almost be something like a death and resurrection? Paul when he was talking about Jesus being alive said this:

1 Corinthians 15:6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles . . .

- He appeared to his brother. That must have been amazing.
- It changed the entire trajectory of James life.

- He went from being a skeptic and a doubter to the leader of the first church in Jerusalem. *Galatians 1:18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord’s brother.*
- When Peter was let out of prison, he told the church to tell James about it. *Acts 12:17 Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. “Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,” he said, and then he left for another place.*
- He was one of the pillar of the early church, along with John and Peter. He was one of those who commissioned Paul to take the good news of Jesus to the Gentiles (or non-Jews). *Galatians 2:8 For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. 9 James, Peter and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.*
- When Paul came back from the mission field to talk about what God was doing, it was James who led the discussion. *Acts 15:12 The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. 13 When they finished, James spoke up. “Brothers,” he said, “listen to me.*
- He became known as a man of prayer (again, praying to his brother) and in the end, around 62 AD, it is believed that James was killed for his faith in his half brother as his Lord and Savior, by being stoned or beaten to death.
- If that is the life of James, then it makes total sense to consider Jesus as the risen Savior as he claimed.
- So that’s the author. What about his audience for this letter?

II. Who was he writing to?

James 1:1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.

- James was probably written between AD 48 and 52.
- Since he was one of the chief leaders of the Jerusalem church, which in the early years was composed of almost all Jews, it makes sense that he is writing to mostly of Messianic Jews scattered abroad away from Jerusalem where he lived.
- Some believe that the lack of mention of Gentile Christians in the letter make it likely that it was one of the first New Testament books written.
- It helps us to understand the history of the church in those early years.
- After Jesus returned to heaven, he commissioned his followers to make disciples, not just in Jerusalem, but everywhere.
- While things were great for a while, the church fell on hard times in those next 20 years.
- There was famine and poverty that made life difficult. There was an increasing persecution that scattered the Christ-followers all over the known world.
- So unlike many of Paul’s letters, which are addressed to a specific group of people in a specific situation, James is writing to the Christ-followers everywhere who are undergoing some stressful situations and were always tempted to fall back into living like they had before they followed Jesus.
- So why did he write this letter, which he knew would be distributed among the Christ-followers?

III. What was his purpose?

- It's odd because except for two little spots, James' entire letter does not mention Jesus.
- In fact, Martin Luther, the man who was instrumental in the reformation and who was the man who changed how people interacted with Jesus and Scripture, was openly critical of James.
- He wondered whether it belonged in our Bibles, even suggesting it be thrown out of schools.
- *"We should throw the epistle of James out of this school, for it doesn't amount to much. It contains not a syllable about Christ. Not once does it mention Christ, except at the beginning. I maintain that some Jew wrote it who probably heard about Christian people but never encountered any. Since he heard that Christians place great weight on faith in Christ, he thought, 'Wait a moment! I'll oppose them and urge works alone.' This he did."* (Martin Luther)
- Luther's biggest issue with the Book of James was that it appeared to contradict Paul, and it seemed to oppose the doctrine of justification by faith alone.
- Paul said we are saved by grace, not by works. We can do nothing to save ourselves.
- James, as we are going to see, says that faith without works is dead.
- On the surface, Luther seems right, but the reality is different.
- James is not suggesting in any way that works lead to our salvation. It's a result of it.
- James's aim in writing to the church was not to give a theological presentation of the gospel.
- He is writing to those who already believe it. His goal is to help them live faithfully as followers of Jesus. He does so quite bluntly. We are going to see that James wants to get in their business and challenge how they, and in turn us, live.
- The gospel of Jesus – which James understands deeply and affirms completely – results in a new life of obedience when a person believes.
- The way he writes the letter is rather unique in Scripture.
- It is not so much a sermon, or one long chain of thoughts like Ephesians or Colossians, but rather, it is a collection of wisdom and advice from James.
- The structure is reminiscent of Proverbs 1-9 in that it is a collection of short wisdom wisdom, filled with metaphors and easy to remember 1 liners. It has a consistent focus on practical action in the life of faith.
- The content echoes and quotes primarily from Jesus' instructions that we find in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).
- Chapter 1 sets up the rest of the book and summarizes what is to come.
- 2:1-13: Favoritism----- Matthew 5:46-48
- 2:14-26: Faith ----- Matthew 7:21-27
- 3:1-12: Tongue ----- Luke 6:43-45
- 3:13-18: True vs False wisdom ----- Matthew 5:3-11
- 4:1-10: Divided heart ----- Matthew 6:21
- 4:11-12: Condemn ----- Matthew 12:36-37
- 4:13-17: Arrogance of Wealth ----- Matthew 6:28-34
- 5:1-6: Danger of Wealth ----- Matthew 6:19-21
- 5:7-11: Patience and Hope ----- Matthew 24:13
- 5:12: Tell truth ----- Matthew 5:37
- 5:13-18: Faith filled prayer ----- Matthew 21:21-22
- 5:19-20: Restoring others ----- Matthew 18:15
- Throughout this entire letter, James writes a series of what sometimes looks like unrelated topics, yet they are all connected.
- James is filled with direct commands to pursue a life of holiness.

- It is a little “in your face” in our day and age.
 - This is because in James mind, a faith that does not produce real life change is a worthless faith.
 - The entire theme of this book that we are going to be going through is this:
 - **AUTHENTIC FAITH PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS.**
 - Faith in Jesus is not abstract. It is not an intellectual proposition. It is not something that we believe that has no effect in the real world.
 - Deep down you know this. You can all spot someone who says one thing and lives differently. You know people who say with their mouths that they are one type of person but then you spend time around them and you realize what they are really like.
 - Faith in Jesus is eminently practical in the real world of our jobs, our families, our hobbies, on how we act with our neighbors, what drives our actions, how we use our money, and more.
 - In writing this letter, James gives numerous practical examples to illustrate his point.
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- If you are here and you are a follower of Jesus, this series that we are going to be doing is going to challenge how you approach life. It will push you to see if what you say you believe is matched by the life you live.
 - We will not get this perfectly, but it should be the trajectory of our lives.
 - If you are here and are not a follower of Jesus, there is still a ton of wisdom that will help you as you live your life, because it is simply good truth. But if you are not a follower of Jesus, I would ask you to consider deeply what this book says in light of who Jesus claims to be.
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- This letter, written almost 2000 years ago, was written by a man who grew up next to Jesus.
 - A man who did not believe that Jesus was who he said he was. This was his brother, the guy he grew up around. He had seen and been with him.
 - He was not a follower of Jesus. He had his own life to live.
 - Then his brother got himself in trouble through the things he claimed and was crucified and put to death by the Romans.
 - We have no idea what James thought. Was he sorrowful? Most likely. Did he shake his head and say, “What did you expect based on the stuff you said?” Did he wonder about all the miracles he heard that Jesus had done but dismiss them because, after all, this is my brother.
 - This man, days after his brother died, saw him in the flesh. Along with other people. And he realized that all the things Jesus said about himself were, in fact, true. He was God. He not only predicted his death and resurrection, but did it. He was alive.
 - Suddenly all the things he had said began to take on a whole new flavor.
 - And Jesus went from being his brother to being his Lord and his Savior.
 - It changed the course of his entire life to the point that he prayed to Jesus, led the church of Jesus in Jerusalem and ultimately sent this letter to many others to encourage them to follow him.
 - It even led him to his death.
 - James believed enough to write to those who claimed to follow Jesus.
 - He wanted them to understand that **AUTHENTIC FAITH PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS.**
 - In doing so, it changes everything.
 - Homework this week:
 - [WATCH THIS ON <https://thebibleproject.com/all-videos/read-scripture-new-testament/> AN 8 MINUTE OVERVIEW]