

## Living by Faith I: Introduction

August 6, 2017

James 1: 1

As I announced before, we are beginning a new book, James, this week. Some people criticize that James has no theology because it doesn't have much about basic Christian doctrines. We see nothing about the direct ministry of the Holy Spirit. It doesn't say anything about Christ's church or the fulfillment of the OT in Christ. We don't see any reference to Jesus' death and resurrection. As a matter of fact, Christ's name is mentioned only twice (1:1; 2:1) in the entire letter. So, claiming that James is 'un-theological' is appealing, but before we judge the book, we need to understand who wrote the book and why.

According to verse 1, James wrote this letter, but which James is it? There are four James in the Bible. The first one is the father of Judas (Luke 6:16). His name is mentioned to distinguish his son Judas from Judas Iscariot. You don't need to remember his name. The second James is the son of Alphaeus, who is one of the Twelve. His name is also mentioned only once in the Bible (Mark 3:18). The third one is the son of Zebedee, who is the brother of John. This James is an important figure in the Bible. Along with his brother John and Simon Peter, he became one of the closest apostles to Jesus (Mark 1:19; 5:37; 9:2). The fourth James is the half-brother of our Lord Jesus (Gal 1:19). Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. After him, Joseph and Mary had other children and James was one of them. It is believed that he is the author of this letter. What do you think what was going in his mind when he wrote this letter?

I have a brother who is more handsome, smarter, and nicer. In our childhood, people always said my brother was handsome but they said to me I looked cute or healthy. My brother was very thoughtful and I was just playful. So, everyone liked my brother. I loved my brother too, but sometimes I felt jealous because he got all of the attention from people. Now think about James, the brother of Jesus, the Son of God. Do you think Jesus ever disobeyed his parents? Do you think Jesus bullied his friends? No, I don't think so. I think Jesus was perfect in his words and deeds. He didn't lie. He didn't sin either. James saw that his brother Jesus was always loved and even respected by his parents. And he was just a normal boy. Growing up under that kind of brother, how would James feel about Jesus? Probably, his memory of Jesus might not always be pleasant. He might be jealous or even hateful toward Jesus. One day, Jesus said he is the Messiah. James didn't believe it, or he didn't want to believe it. He came and said that Jesus was out of his mind (Mark 3:21), and tried to bring Jesus back home. James was not a believer until after the resurrection.

As you may know, Jesus stayed for 40 days on earth after the resurrection. He appeared to many to encourage and challenge them for the sake of the church. Paul recorded to whom Jesus appeared. *"Christ was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles"* (1 Corinthians 15:4-7). When Jesus appeared to Peter, there were other disciples too (cf. John 21). He showed himself to more than 500 men. Then it looks like James was the only individual Jesus came to see alone. Why? James didn't believe in Jesus at that time. What did Jesus say to James? Only they knew their conversation, but we can guess Jesus showed James his palms where nails went through and the side where he

shed all of his blood. James couldn't deny Jesus anymore. Jesus must be either a crazy man or the Messiah, and James believed Jesus must be the Messiah.

After he received the Holy Spirit, James became the first bishop of the Jerusalem church. He was one of the most influential figures in the early church. When the gentiles were not accepted into the church, it was James who spoke up for them (cf. Acts 15). He taught his fellow Jewish people about the salvation through Jesus. James' influence became so strong that even some of the rulers believed in Jesus, which horrified the scribes and Pharisees. They wanted to use James to discourage the people from believing since James was Jesus' bother and the first bishop of the church. They brought James to the top of the temple in order to get him to deny Jesus by threatening to push him to the ground.<sup>1</sup> However, James couldn't deny Jesus who was born as his brother to save the world. As he wrote in verse 1, I am "*a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.*" It was because he knew Jesus not only in his knowledge but also in his experience. He met Jesus in his heart. People pushed him to the ground, but it didn't kill him. He rose to his knees and began to pray for them. "I beg of you, Lord God our Father, forgive them! They do not know what they are doing." The Pharisees on the ground began to stone him as he prayed, while those from the roof rushed down to join the execution. That was how James was martyred. James wanted to follow Jesus all the way to the end.

Now, who are the recipients? The letter was written to "the 12 tribes scattered among the nations." The 12 tribes indicate the Jews, but the key word is "scattered." James is implying the Jews who were scattered among gentile nations who would be the seeds of the gospel. In a narrow sense, the recipients were the scattered Jews (*diaspora*). In a broad sense, the letter is for all of those who are going through trials. You can tell the main theme of James is "living by faith", particularly through trials. Are you going through some trials? Do you feel you are somehow left alone? How can we deal with all kinds of hardships in life? The answer is in this letter. We will learn how to keep our faith even in our trials.

Before we look at more details from each verse, let me point out the overall teachings of the letter. The theme of the book is "living by faith." His intention was not to teach the basic Christian doctrines, but the practice of Christianity. James wrote this letter to Christians who already knew the basic stuff. He wanted to teach Christians how to live out their faith.

First, we will experience peace. There will be conflicts among us because we are different, but when we live by faith, we will learn to control our tongue because as James says, "*it is a restless evil, full of deadly poison*" (3:8b). We will learn the wisdom that comes from heaven so that we know what to say and how to say it. We will also learn to be patient and humble. As Christians, we seek peace not only with God but also with one another. Secondly, true faith will teach us true love. We all want to see some changes for the better. How nice it will be to become more gentle and caring? How about becoming more thoughtful? We like to see some good changes in our life, but a change doesn't come naturally. It comes when we submit to God, which is another word for "living by faith." As we go through some changes, we will not judge others; we will not show any favoritism; but we will love others as ourselves. Lastly, true faith will teach us to pray. James is known as "the Just" as he observed the Law to be holy and pure before God. And he is

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.christian-history.org/death-of-james.html>

also known as having “camel’s knees.” It is because he knelt so many times that his knees became as hard as a camel’s. He calls out Christians. *“Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord” (5:13-14). “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (5:16b).*

We are all looking for different things. You may look for a better relationship through this study, or better circumstances? You may seek wisdom from heaven. Or you may want to have camel’s knees just as James had. As we become obedient to God, to the Word, I am sure God will change us in His way.

As I said earlier, James mentioned Jesus’ name only twice in this letter. Everyone knew he was Jesus’ brother. If people wanted to praise Mary, Jesus’ mother, they might praise James too. James never mentioned he was Jesus’ brother. Rather, he said, *“I am a servant (slave) of the Lord Jesus Christ.”* I think that is one of the reasons that he didn’t mention Jesus’ name. He was humble. He just wanted to give all the glory to Jesus and to teach people to live by faith. That was how he began and ended the letter. Likewise, our story must begin with our confession, *“Lord, I am your servant. I am your slave. Teach me so that I may turn from my wicked ways.”* In our humility and patience, we will learn to live by faith. Amen.