

James: The Messenger and His Message

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Preacher: Cedric Moss

[0 : 00] This morning we are commencing a new sermon series in the book of James.! The book of James is a rather short book, a letter letter, but it covers a diverse number!

of messages or themes that are all important to the Christian life. And on face value one of the mistakes that we can make is to think that James is just a random assortment of messages here and there.

But James is so much more than that. When we really look at the letter of James, we see a unifying theme in all that James has written.

And that theme is that James calls those who profess to know Christ to demonstrate the evidence that they truly know Christ.

That is the theme that runs through this book. That those who know Christ are to give evidence that they actually belong to Christ.

[1 : 10] James is very critical of a profession of faith that has no evidence that it is genuine faith. And I think you would agree with me that this theme is very timely.

One of the interesting things that I see in some of the updates I get from different news sources that help me to keep abreast of what's going on around the world is that they're saying that more and more people are professing having come to faith in Christ.

And we hear it. We hear about, you know, this one had a revival and this many people and so forth. And when you hear these numbers, as staggering as they are, you begin to think, well, things should begin to look different on the ground.

But we hear so many of these stories and the evidence that people are truly turning to God in evidential ways is really, really lacking.

And again, James challenges that kind of profession of faith. Well, this morning, my task is to introduce us to this letter of James.

[2 : 28] And I want to do so by briefly looking at the man James and his message.

And we'll just have a quick overview of the book of James and then we'll be dismissed. This morning, I want to consider a single verse. It's the first verse of the letter.

So if you've not yet done so, please turn to the letter of James. James chapter 1 and verse 1.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes in the dispersion, greetings.

Let's pray together. But thank you for your word. Every word of it is inspired.

[3 : 32] And I pray that you would use this particular verse that we have just read to introduce us to this letter of James, to truly open our hearts to the message contained in this letter.

We ask for grace, Lord, in this moment, on this first Sunday of the year, to hear your word as we should. Speak to us now.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Commenting on James 1-1, theologian Douglas Moo writes the following. Many readers skip the opening verses of New Testament letters, treating them as unimportant formal details.

But this is a mistake. For the letter introductions usually contain more than names. They also describe the writer and the recipient in ways that provide us with important clues about the nature and purpose of the letter that follows.

[4 : 44] The introduction of James is no exception. Those are the words of a wise and experienced theologian, Douglas Moo.

And so taking his wise caution this morning, we don't want to skip over quickly this first introductory verse in the letter of James.

James, although it is a short greeting, it states for us the author's identity. It also reveals for us the author's humility.

And then it also sets forth the author's ministry. And that's what I want us to consider briefly this morning, those three aspects of this introduction.

And so we begin with the first one, the author's identity. It simply says James. James was as common in that day, perhaps more common in that day than it is today.

[5 : 50] And so immediately that should tell us that James must have been known to the people to whom he was writing. You have to be well known to simply introduce a letter that's going to 12 tribes in Israel in dispersion that have been scattered abroad around the world in many countries to introduce yourself simply by using that name, James.

Now when we consider the various men in the New Testament who were named James, there are really only two who would have had the kind of prominence who would have been able to write such a letter and introduce themselves by just James.

And those two men are, the first one, James, the son of Zebedee, who was one of the 12 apostles, and James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But we know that James, the son of Zebedee, one of the Lord's disciples, that he died very early. We're told in Acts chapter 12, verse 2, that he was beheaded. And that leaves only one other one.

[7 : 18] That leaves the Lord's half-brother, James, who we're told in John chapter 7, verse 5, that he, along with his other siblings, didn't believe that Jesus was the Messiah initially.

But James, the Lord's half-brother, eventually came to faith, and he was the head of the church in Jerusalem, a position that he held until he was martyred about 20 or so years later.

But beyond this process of elimination as to who this James really is, there's more evidence that identifies this author of James as the Lord's half-brother.

For example, if we look at Acts chapter 15, when we examine the speech that James gave in that chapter at Jerusalem, at a council they were having, when we compare it to the language that we find in the book of James, we'll see that there are several parallels in terms of what is said in Acts 15 and what we find in the letter of James.

And so it is very easy to associate that the one who spoke those words recorded in Acts 15 is also the one who wrote these words recorded in the letter of James.

[8 : 45] And then certainly we have the longstanding tradition in church history that tells us that James, the Lord's half-brother, is the author of James, who simply identifies himself as James.

But yet there are still disputes. There are still disputes about whether James, the Lord's half-brother, did in fact write this letter.

In the 16th century, there were those who came up and said, no, he didn't write it. They objected. And one of the reasons they objected to the Lord's half-brother writing this letter is they say that the grammar and the linguistic skills that are found in the letter of James, they said someone like the Lord's half-brother could not have written this.

They say the grammar is beyond him or would have been beyond him. So what they say is that, well, he may have written it, but then somebody came along and they polished it and changed things around for it to be in the form that we have it today.

But we have some insightful words from another theologian, J.A. Mortia, and he gives a very wise response to those who say that this letter was, the grammar in it is really beyond the Lord's half-brother.

[10 : 12] Here's what he pointedly says. He says, artistic skills and exceptional abilities owe nobody an explanation. Time and time again, these rise, were at least expected.

And so we accept the evidence that the letter of James was, in the tradition of the church over many centuries, and from what we're able to see from Scripture, was written by the Lord's half-brother, James.

Well, in addition to this verse telling us who the author is and his identity, this verse also, in a very subtle way, reveals to us the author's humility.

James shows his humility by the way he refers to himself. James refers to himself as a servant, or more literally, as a bond slave.

A bond slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. James chose the lowest form of slavery to identify himself with.

[11 : 32] And he knew what he was doing, because, like, for us, we have one word, we say slave. But they had different kinds. This was a bond slave.

This was the lowest form of slave. And James uses that word to identify who he was. And so here he is writing to all these churches, and he says, James, a slave, a bond slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes in the dispersion.

Here he is, the Lord's half-brother, an apostle, senior pastor of the church in Jerusalem, and yet he refers to himself by none of these titles, none of these associations.

He doesn't say James the apostle, James, head of the church in Jerusalem. He says James, a bond slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Brothers and sisters, this is so important we must not overlook it. James recognized that a slave's identity and dignity were not rooted in who he was or the way he was seen.

[13:02] That slave's identity was connected to whose he was. He was rooted in who he belonged to, and that was true in slavery, that you had a position of esteem or less than esteem depending on who your master was.

And therefore, in the divine scheme of things, James' function and his office were nothing compared to this fact that he was a bond slave.

He was the slave who was a slave for life. And there was this ritual, this practice in the Old Testament when a slave had the opportunity to be free and he loved his master so much, he would say to his master, I don't want to leave you.

And as testimony to that, the master would take the slave, he would take him to the doorpost of the house and he would nail, he would actually bore his heir, nailing him to the house as it were to say, this is where you will forever be.

James said, that's who I am in my relationship to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. That's what mattered to James. And I wonder for us this morning as we consider James' example of humility, how do we see ourselves?

[14:28] Where do you get your identity from? Where do you place the premium and the accent and the value? Is it in what you have done?

Is it perhaps your education, your work, your wealth? Or is it something else? And here's the reality, I believe that all of us have lived long enough to know that whatever it is in this world, it is subject to change.

There's nothing in this life that we find our identity in that will last. And sadly, many people have come to this reality in heartbreaking ways.

where they derive their identity perhaps from a job that came crashing down in COVID-19 from a relationship that ended through death or ended through divorce.

And friends, I think we need to consider this morning is our identity in Christ our greatest and most enduring treasure? Is it what we esteem the most?

[15:59] Or are we settling for these lesser transient things and putting them above the fact that we who have trusted in Christ, we belong to him, we belong to him forever?

We read it earlier in Romans 8 that nothing separates us from the love of God in Jesus Christ. Nothing. What a lasting identity it is to have.

And here's the truth. To whatever degree this morning we can honestly within our hearts say that we find our identity in Christ and that is our most lasting and valuable treasure.

Friends, the only reason we can say that if we do say that this morning is because of the grace of God and work in our lives. Because left to ourselves all of us would be doing what the world does. The world boasts in what it has and what it has accomplished. left to ourselves naturally we would find our identity somewhere else.

[17:13] And so this morning if you in your heart resonate to say that you have come to know that Christ is your lasting treasure. He is the source of your identity.

That's an evidence of the grace of God at work in your life. Incidentally, one of the other objections that some have put forth as to why James did not write this letter, they say well surely if he was the Lord's half-brother he would have mentioned that in this letter.

He would have said something about that. But what they miss is that James didn't because he was a humble man and James didn't find his identity in the fact that he was related to Christ biologically. James found his identity in the fact that he was related to Christ redemptively and he saw himself as the bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I remember a number of years ago I heard of a story a true story of a man who began to feel symptoms of a heart attack went to Princess Margaret Hospital and he was taken to the back rather

quickly because of his symptoms but they were busy and so he was there waiting his turn to be served and then I'm told that a lady came in and she noticed the man and she recognized who he was and she shouted and she said how could you all have this man waiting and she began to explain to them who the man was and who he was related to and most of the doctors were foreign so they didn't know but when they heard who he related to they all clamored to try to serve this man and to help him regrettably he passed away because he evidently wasn't served in time at least humanly speaking but that man was a humble man

[19 : 34] I think we all know that because most Bahamians if they know a name they push it if they have a card they use it but this man was a humble man he like James didn't just didn't push it didn't say that he was the Lord's brother he was a born slave and that was what was most important to him well third and finally this introduction to the letter of James not only states the author's identity and reveals his humility but it also sets forth the author's ministry his ministry is set forth in these words to the twelve tribes in the dispersion those words communicated disappointment and grief because these are the people to whom

God had given a land these are the people whom God had gone before and supernaturally fought enemies on their behalf and gave them possession of a land but because they were unfaithful and because they rebelled against the Lord as the scripture says the land vomited them out and they were scattered and they were dispersed and so James is writing to a displaced people a people who are in a land that is not their home a people who are surrounded in a culture that's very much unlike their culture James writes to these twelve tribes his ministry is contained in the body of this letter to these twelve tribes again as we've seen it assumes a relationship because the way James wrote to them and perhaps there were particular ones who James knew knew that they were scattered abroad and no doubt as he wrote this letter he had a burden for them as any pastor would he would have he would have cared for them in particular we read about a more recent dispersion that they had because of persecution in Acts chapter 8 and in Acts 11 great persecution had come upon the church and so many of the saints left but the apostles they generally stayed and James was one of them many who have analyzed this letter of James say that James reads more like a sermon unlike letters that Paul would have written which are more like doctrinal treatises James wrote more like he was writing a sermon and again this being the case if I were to summarize what James is saying in this sermon this five chapter sermon it would be something like this genuine believers in

Christ live as genuine believers in Christ that's the pointed way that James wrote his letter and I think that's what he was getting at if you genuinely believe in Christ then you will genuinely live for Christ your life will reflect that you belong to Christ and the topics that we find James addressing in this letter they tease out this broader concern that he has for them that as they are scattered in these different places as they're living in isolation they're there to live as those who belong to Christ James is saying to them though you're away from home as it were though this is not where you really belong your life is to reflect and give evidence to the fact that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ we'll be preaching 22 sermons from this short letter it's a short letter and that's a lot of sermons it'll take us through the end of June but I want to give a chapter by chapter summary as we prepare to close this morning to help us to see the big topics that James addresses in this very frank letter in chapter one James addresses the believer and trials and temptation starting on Sunday next week we'll hear James saying to those who are dispersed essentially you're supposed to see trials differently from those who are around you he's saying to them for you you are to count it as joy you are to recognize that

[25 : 32] God is doing something beyond your trials in your trials it's one of the messages that he addresses in chapter one in chapter two James addresses the believer and faith and works and James challenges what our lives look like when we say we belong to Christ he challenges for example favoritism in the church he challenges when we set up a social order and we treat people differently something that should not happen in the church but sadly does happen in the church in chapter three James deals with the believer and the tongue and wisdom and we'll hear James saying things like how can bitter and sweet water come out of the same fountain how can you with the same mouth bless

God and then curse your brother in chapter four James focuses on the believer and pride and humility he addresses why we fight and have conflicts ask most of us why we're fighting and we have conflicts we will give you the facts James gets to our heart he says no it's not those facts it's

what's going on inside your heart many of us no doubt have plans for this year James challenges that James says how dare you say what you're going to do tomorrow what you're going to do next year he says you must say if the Lord will and he reminds us that we must humble ourselves and recognize that we don't own even a second to speak for it only God knows only God knows and then he concludes in chapter five by looking at the believer and patience and prayer and he addresses again at the end of the letter something he addresses at the beginning of the letter this whole issue of suffering and we read the book of James and we wonder how do people come away believing that the Christian life is a bed of roses and that if you serve God that you will not have trials and you will not suffer James is not so and so what James does is he doesn't spend time trying to get us to psych ourselves out so that we could somehow live above trouble and live above suffering what he does though is he helps us to get a biblical perspective in the midst of suffering how to be patient in the midst of it how to pray in the midst of it Prince James had much to say to his original audience and he has much to say to us I pray we would hear it I pray the Lord would so ordain it and allow that we would be together as we hear the message of James together we who have trusted in Christ we are very much like these to whom James wrote we are in dispersion this world is not our home we are living in a hostile world in a foreign land away from the place where our true citizenship! Our citizenship scripture says is above and the matters that we're important for these Jewish believers to hear in the context in which they lived in the context in which they serve God they're important for us to hear in the context in which we live and the context in which we serve the Lord and so may the Lord help us to hear and heed the message of this amazing and challenging and honest book James is the kind of friend you want James is the kind of friend who will speak the truth to you in a very straightforward way that when he's done you don't have to guess what he said how many of you have friends or people in your life when they say things you say did he just correct me or compliment me won't be like that with James we will we will hear in a very straightforward way the words of this book and may the Lord help us to hear it and may help us to hear it that's great [30 : 31] Lord we pray this morning that you would help us to embrace the message of the book of James over the next several months Lord it is your inspired word your word endures your word is timeless help us to hear and heed the message of this book we pray and ask in Jesus name up