

James on Jesus

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 29 October 2014

Preacher: Rev. James Maciver

[0 : 00] Now briefly this evening let's turn to James chapter 1 and also looking at the first verse of chapter 2. We're really going to look at the first verse of each chapter as we find these verses describing the Lord Jesus Christ.

James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. And then in chapter 2 I have rather show no partiality as you hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ the Lord of glory.

It's right I think that we focus in our approach to the Lord's Supper once again on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes we focus on other aspects of our own relationship to him such as faith but it is of benefit to us I think more than anything else to focus on himself, on his person, on certain aspects of the Lord's person and work as that's brought before us in the scriptures.

Now this letter of James was probably in all likelihood the first of the New Testament writings to be written. And that's if we accept the letter to have been written by James the brother of the Lord or the half brother of the Lord.

Same mother of course the Lord didn't have a human father. Jesus was her firstborn and we understand that others would have been born subsequent to that who would therefore be of the same mother as the Lord.

[1 : 38] And this James out of the four Jameses that are mentioned in the New Testament is by far the most likely author of this epistle which would have meant that it was written round about sometime like between 40 and 50 years after Christ had returned to heaven.

So it's a very very early part of the New Testament in the time that it was written and it deals with subjects and in a different way with subjects than most if not all of the other New Testament letters. For example James has no reference to the Lord's incarnation, to his birth, to his taking of humanity, no reference to his miracles or any of the works that he did in that respect, no reference at all to the death of Jesus, no reference to his resurrection, no reference to his ascension.

And that doesn't mean of course that James didn't know anything about these topics or it doesn't mean that some liberal scholars would have it that these things had not yet really been thought about and formulated at that very early time of the New Testament church.

It was later on these scholars suggest that these things were formulated so if James wrote his letter as he did that early then he wouldn't really have had a proper understanding of that.

[3 : 01] That's liberal scholarship, that's not the kind of thing that we have to accept at all from the teaching of the scriptures themselves. The reason he doesn't actually mention these things is that it wasn't his purpose to set out a theology of the person of Christ.

That's left to other authors in the New Testament to actually bring out for us. This letter is actually written with the purpose of setting out what you might call Christianity in the daily life of God's people.

It's an intensely practical letter, so intensely practical that some of it is so hugely challenging that it just pierces you through to the soul when you read some of the things that James has to say and some of the accusations that he's laying against those he's writing to as to how they're coming short in living out Christianity or the Christian faith in their practical everyday setting.

In other words, as you go through it, you really have to, and you have to do this with other parts of the Bible anyway, you have to try and get behind the things that he does say so as to get to the person of Jesus in that way.

It's a good exercise to do that in other parts of the Bible too, where you've got practical Christian living set out. It's always, of course, something that will eventually lead you back to Christ, the foundation of our life.

[4 : 31] It's not a very elegant illustration, but if you were going to try and find out about someone, let's just say that you had somebody's waste products, the stuff that you put in the bin, the recyclables and all that stuff, and supposing that was put in front of you and you were to rummage through it and say, now tell me what kind of person this person is.

You would then start going through the various objects there. You'd have to have a look at what sort of things they used in daily life, what sort of juices they had, what sort of other things did they eat, what sort of papers did they discard, were they smokers?

All those sort of things will give you clues. Are there packets there as packaging for medication? That tells you something about their health and their way of life. You could actually gather together a pretty good picture from all of these things that had been disposed of, but that had been used by that person.

Now, if you go to the scriptures, a letter like James, you've got to look at the things that are there and try and get behind the text to the likes of the person of Jesus, because it's not mentioned in terms of his death or resurrection, specifically in the theology of it, but then you see you go to the likes of chapter 5 and verse 7, and if you look at that verse, there you see, be patient therefore, brothers, until the coming or unto the coming of the Lord.

Well, nobody's going to write that unless he understands something of what actually leads up to that, something of what happened in order that we're now in the position for being waiters, waiting for the Lord to return.

[6 : 19] In other words, James had a perfect understanding, a good grasp of the ministry of the Lord. He's waiting as he's calling upon his readers to wait patiently for the coming of the Lord.

Well, what went before that? Well, his death, his resurrection, his ascension. Of course, he would know these things. Why was he going to speak about the coming of the Lord if he didn't know where he was?

See, all of these things give you a clue and an identity to the person that he's talking about. And as you come to these two verses, the first verse and the second, in the first chapter and the first verse of the second chapter, you'll find there a description of the Lord.

So, as you dig in behind these two verses, what is it you find?

What does it tell us about Jesus? What does it tell us about James' belief, James' understanding about who this person Jesus actually was and is?

[7 : 31] Three things. First of all, he understood that Jesus is God. That he is divine in his person.

James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, James is presenting himself as a servant. We'll come back to that word in a minute and later on. But he's a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In other words, he is saying that at the same time, he is a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. But he's putting those two terms together in such a way that being a servant of one must mean you're a servant of the other in the same sort of way.

So that what he's saying really is, Jesus Christ actually being a servant of Jesus Christ is the same as being a servant of God. And the equation is then worked out.

It's a kind of theological mathematics. If being a servant of God is the same as being a servant of Jesus or the other way about, then Jesus equals God.

[8 : 35] He is the same in nature as the God of whom James is saying that he's a servant. He couldn't see that he was a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ in exactly the same way as a person is a servant of God unless this Jesus Christ is himself God.

The same quality of service, the same relationship of service, the same position that he occupies with respect to God, he has it with respect to Jesus.

And therefore, it is putting it together in such a way that he is saying he's placing Jesus Christ on the same footing as God, on the same level as God.

Now remember who this is, who this writer is. This is James. This is not just the brother of the Lord who knew him as one of that family in which he was brought up.

This is a Jew. And he's writing to Jews. He's writing to those 12 tribes of the dispersion. This was, the dispersion happened through a particular persecution that broke out under one of the Roman emperors.

[9 : 51] And he's writing to the scattered tribes that these Jewish people that had had to flee under that persecution to different parts all around that area.

And he's saying he's writing to them, writing to his fellow Jews, but he's writing as a Jew. And the last thing that a committed Jew would do would be to describe any person as God unless he was absolutely certain that he is God.

He would not apply the word God to any being but God himself. And nevertheless, he's saying James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And that, of course, reminds us that as we come to remember the Lord's death, we always have to be careful about who it is we're remembering and whose death we're remembering.

Because we're prone in our thinking. I am prone my thinking, you're prone in your thinking. Because it's such an incredible thing to actually realize and hold fast to that it was God who came to give himself in the person of his son to the death of the cross.

[11:09] We're prone to thinking that because Jesus is God in the flesh, that the person who died on the cross was the human Jesus.

That he is the person, that the person of the Jesus who died on the cross is defined in terms of his humanity. Because the humanity of Jesus was real, and it was in that humanity he suffered, and it was in that humanity that he was put to death, that he gave himself to death.

But who did? It wasn't a humanity that existed by itself. The humanity of the Lord is the humanity of the Son of God.

And everything that Jesus did, including in his sufferings and in his death on the cross, he did as the Son of God. He suffered as the Son of God in our flesh, in his flesh, in his human nature.

But the person who experienced that suffering in his human nature is the person of the Son of God. You cannot ever define this person in terms of his humanity alone.

[12:26] You cannot in fact define his person except as he is divine, as he is the Son of God. God always asks the question, who is this? Who is he in his sufferings?

Who is he as he gives himself into the custody of those who took him to put him on trial? Who did that? The Son of God did that. Who is this that is being nailed to the cross who says, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do?

The Son of God. What is his person? What is he distinguished by as a person? He is divine. In his person, he is the Son of God.

He is God. And who is this who comes to lie as a helpless, dependent, infant, child born into the world?

And who is this near the end of his journey who is found on the cross enduring such sufferings?

[13:27] who is that person? What's his identity? You can't just say that's a human nature or that's a human person and nothing else.

This person is the Son of God. That's what makes it so staggering. that's what makes us liable to think it just cannot be.

But it is. And James, as he puts this together for us, and as we come to approach the Lord's Supper, and as we handle these elements, God willing, on the Lord's Day of the bread and of the cup that represent to us the sufferings and the death of Christ, ask yourself the question as you reach out and take these and as you eat and as you drink from the cup, ask yourself the question, who does this represent?

Not just what, but who? And the answer is, it represents the Son of God in my nature, in our humanity, giving himself to that death which none but he could die.

James is saying that this Jesus is God, that he is divine. But secondly, if we turn to the first verse of the next chapter, James is telling us that Jesus is not only God, but God dwelling in his people or in the midst of his people.

[15:12] I'd rather show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. The last part of the verse there is particularly what we're focusing on.

The Lord Jesus Christ, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. Now the words the Lord of, or the Lord there, don't actually appear in the Greek text of the New Testament.

So literally, what you find is as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the glory. That's such an interesting thing that that's exactly what James wrote.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the glory. Why would he write that? Why would he describe the Lord Jesus Christ as the glory? Why would he just tack on these words, the glory, after he's given him the name, the Lord Jesus Christ?

Well, surely that goes back to the Old Testament, of which James was a very good scholar. Because the Old Testament tells us something about the glory.

[16:18] And it tells us something about the glory in terms of what was seen in the New Testament age and what was certainly at the very heart of the people's life, the glory that dwelt above the mercy seat in the Holy of Holies, in the tabernacle later in the temple.

But as you find, the tabernacle described by God to Moses as to how he was to build it. You'll notice, of course, how carefully every detail was given to Moses and how carefully he had to actually build the tabernacle in accordance with God's exact specification.

Why? Not just because God was requiring it, but because God was going to live in it. God was going to manifest his presence there.

God was going to say about this tabernacle, there is an outer court and there is a holy place and then there is at the very heart of it the Holy of Holies where sacrifice is rendered on the day of atonement where blood is sprinkled at the foot of the altar and above it there is, above the mercy seat between the cherubim on each side there is the Shekinah, the Hebrew word for the cloud, the cloud of glory, the cloud that represented God, the cloud of which the people knew as the very dwelling place of God in their midst.

It was such a huge feature of Old Testament religion, of Old Testament worship. and that cloud of glory and where it was situated and what it represented was so important in the life, in the daily life of the people.

[18:07] Their life revolved around it. Their encampment had to be camped around it in equal measure. All the tents of Israel had to be situated equally in a kind of square shape round the tabernacle at the center of which was the cloud of the presence.

God was the centerpiece of their lives. But it was God who had come down to manifest Himself, to show Himself, to reveal Himself in their midst in that way.

And that, of course, was an anticipation. It was something that looked forward, something that represented what would come in the New Testament and what would come especially in the person of God's own Son, God's divine Son.

Because that's how Isaiah foretold it in his prophecy, one whose name would be Emmanuel, God with us. And when Matthew came to introduce his account, his gospel of the ministry of Christ, this is what he said, that this is so that what was written by the prophet would be fulfilled.

He's talking about the birth of Jesus Christ, that it would be fulfilled what was written by the prophet. He shall be called Emmanuel, God with us.

[19:31] But it's God with us by incarnation. That's the incredible thing. God was with the people in the Old Testament. God was in their midst. God was manifested through that cloud, but that cloud anticipated.

That cloud was a type. That cloud was a representation of something even more wonderful. And it was God coming to be in their midst by becoming one of us. By taking our human nature to himself. By dwelling in us. As he would later even exceed that by dwelling in us in and through his spirit. But the dwelling of God in Jesus Christ is something which fulfills what anticipated it in the Old Testament.

And that is what James has in mind surely when he's describing the Lord Jesus Christ the glory. He's going back in his mind to that amazing Old Testament phenomenon.

And he's saying now this has been fulfilled in this person. And what a what an incredible thing it must have been for James.

[20:43] For James the brother of the Lord James brought up in the same family as Jesus Christ. What an incredible thing for him to write that this brother in that human sense was in fact the glory.

That he is God in the midst of his people. gospel. And that's why John introduced his gospel in the wonderful way he does.

Where he talks about in the beginning was the word. That's the same person. The word. The way in which God speaks. In the beginning was the word.

And the word was with God. The closest possible relationship. it. And the word was God. And then he goes through a whole lot of verses until you come to verse 14.

And the word became flesh and tabernacled among us. And we beheld his glory.

[21:51] The glory of the only begotten Son of God. Full of grace and truth. See it all comes together. John also has the same thing in mind as Jesus.

This person that he had come to know so well. This person that he had come to love so well. Here is James the first of the New Testament writers we believe to write any of the New Testament. There is John the last of the apostles. One of the last to write anything of the Old Testament. Letters. But they both of the same mind and the same conviction that Jesus that they knew and shared faith in was the glory and is the glory and is God manifest in the flesh. He tabernacled in the flesh and we beheld. There is the other thing that John is really adding to this. The Lord Jesus Christ the glory. What John is saying to us is not just that God took up residence in human nature.

God took up residence amongst his people. There is a revelation associated with that. Because John is saying we beheld his glory.

[23 : 05] God revealed something of his glory to us in this person because he fulfilled the cloud of glory from Old Testament days. But fulfilled it in a way that far exceeded the revelation that was in the cloud in the tabernacle because for one thing the people couldn't see it as it was in the midst of the tabernacle.

The high priest once a year went in before that spectacle of the cloud above the mercy seat. John is saying we we beheld we all saw it.

We looked upon him. Our hands have handled this word. Jesus Christ is James the glory. And in fact the previous writer to the Hebrews has a similar beginning to his letter.

A long time ago many times in many ways God spoke to our fathers by the prophets but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son whom he appointed the heir of all things through whom also he created the world.

he is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. What is that saying?

[24 : 28] It is saying that not only did God reveal himself in the glory in Jesus Christ in his person as the son of God himself God fully he revealed himself in a way that is exactly what God is like.

Nobody now has to ask what is God like? Because God has revealed to us what he is like and he is like what you find in Jesus Christ.

He is the exact imprint of his nature. Just as you find a seal going into molten wax or if you put your hand into something that is soft and pliable to begin with and then it hardens you take your hand away and you find the exact imprint of your hand fingerprints and everything included in the impression that is left.

When you go to Jesus Christ you find the exact imprint of God. One of the theologians long ago put it this way there is nothing unlike Jesus in God.

That is one way of putting it. There is nothing unlike Jesus in God. When you think of what is God what is God's nature what is he like what is his being like as he has revealed himself to us.

[26 : 05] Of course we can only comprehend tiniest fragments of it even of what is revealed but you can say this that there is nothing in God that is unlike Jesus Christ because he's the exact imprint of his nature of being.

The Lord Jesus Christ the glory. And John says something quite remarkable about the glory of Christ or Christ being glorified and that is that it actually includes the whole process of his death and resurrection and ascension without in any way interfering with the humiliation of the Lord the humbling of himself the sufferings that were entailed in it the limitations that he placed himself under in terms of coming to be a servant in our nature there is nevertheless for the Lord's people that is in all of that there is a glory about it.

It's the son of God in his humiliation but doing something that is so important and so significant and indeed so glorious as to bring redemption to us by what he did for us.

So when you go to take the elements of the supper to yourself you don't just ask yourself who is this and reply this is the divine person this is God this is the son of God in my nature that's what's represented here you also say this is the glory this is the glory of God the person of his son we beheld his glory John was saying that about him and what he saw of his ministry of his transfiguration of his death of his resurrection of his exaltation of his vision in the book of Revelation as God in Jesus Christ revealed himself to him in that blinding figure that he saw before him before whom he fell down as dead and yet the glory laid his hand on him and said don't be afraid it is I I'm the one who was alive and died and I'm alive forever more the voice of the glory the voice of the person of the son of God now exalted but you see what he was saying was I died I died imagine John aware of that glorious person and appearance of Jesus Christ as he's there in the isle of Patmos on his own meditating on the Lord's day and all of a sudden this great revelation is given to

him and this glorious person is the very one who says I am the living one who died and I am now alive forever more that's who you are remembering the living one who died and is now alive forever more and thirdly we learn from this that Jesus and that

[29 : 46] James saw Jesus as our redeemer you go back to the first verse of the first chapter again James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ that word servant exactly the same word we saw on the Lord's day with Paul's writing the word doulos or servant or bond servant or slave it has this idea of being bonded to someone so closely we saw it in Romans 6 bonded to sin but redeemed from that released from that and bonded now to Jesus Christ well that's the same idea that he's got in it but we didn't have time to go into the Lord's day servant actually this idea in the New Testament has in it the idea of being bought by someone who's now your employer or your owner or keeper because the slaves in the New Testament slaves were bought in the marketplace and Paul uses that idea frequently in his writings and it's behind the use of the word here in James as well it's the idea of us coming to be bought at great cost to be servants of

God we didn't come to be servants of God by paying for the privilege ourselves we couldn't meet the cost of it to be brought into that living relationship with God where our sins are forgiven and forever atoned for the cost of that is no less than what the New Testament calls the blood of Christ that's where the whole idea of ransom comes in as well remember Jesus Mark 10 verse 45 one of the great texts in the New Testament where he says even the son of man by which he means this divine figure that he himself is for even the son of man came not to be ministered to but to minister in other words he came not to be served but to be a servant and to give his life a ransom for many ransom is the cost of redemption the cost of purchasing the cost of bringing us back to God and as Peter puts it in his first letter you know that you were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver or gold but by the precious blood of Christ he paid the price he is Jesus the divine son of God in our midst but as our redeemer and it's in remembrance of his death as he came to redeem you that you remember him in the Lord's supper of course that means just as it was with a slave in those days the master who paid the price and brought him to be his servant in his home or in our home had total rights of full ownership over that person they had full rights of ownership and in an even greater way so does Jesus

Christ as Paul wrote in 1st Corinthians 6 you are not your own you have been bought with a price a ransom price and that's really why this letter of James is the way it is because we are under obligation to the one who bought us to live out practical Christianity in accordance with his ownership in accordance with his rights over us that's why he tells us here in chapter 2 that faith is not a mere confession faith is seen in its practicalities we find it in verse 17 there and in verse 26 of chapter 2 faith by itself if it does not have works is dead for us the body apart from the spirit is dead so also faith apart from works is dead that's why when you go through this great letter this piercing searching letter of James you find that he talks about such things as standing up to the tests that come away being steadfast under trial why he talks about there should be no favoritism for those who have the faith that's faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ he talks about quality and soundness of speech our use of the tongue the damage that's caused by that how we have to control our speech he talks about exploitation of the poor he talks about impatience he talks about all sorts of practical things and it's all about being under the service of the Lord Jesus Christ the practical Christianity that we owe to Jesus Christ that practical Christianity in which he is our Lord and where we acknowledge it as we know him as the son of God the divine savior as we know him as God in our midst as we know him as God who has redeemed us one of the more modern songs of Christ Town and puts it a

[35 : 44] Stuart Town and rather puts it the following way in Christ alone it's a wonderful song but it's also lovely sentiment through it in Christ alone my hope is found he is my life my strength my song this cornerstone this solid ground firm through the fiercer's drought and storm what heights of love what depths of peace when fears are stilled when strivings cease my comfort and my all in all here in the love of Christ I stand in Christ alone who took on flesh fullness of God and helpless babe this gift of love and righteousness scorned by the ones he came to save till on that cross Jesus as Jesus died the wrath of God was satisfied for every sin on him was laid here in the death of Christ I live there in the ground his body lay light of the world by darkness slain then bursting forth in glorious day up from the grave he rose again and as he stands in victory sin's curse has lost its grip on me for

I am his and he is mine bought with the precious blood of Christ no guilt in life no fear in death this is the power of Christ in me from life's first cry to final breath Jesus commands my destiny no power of hell no scheme of man can ever pluck me from his hand till he returns or calls me home here in the power of Christ I stand Jesus the son of God Jesus God with us Jesus our redeemer let's pray Lord our gracious God we come before you this evening to express our thanks to you as our father in heaven for the great gift of your son we bless you oh lord that you gave him to that cursed death of the cross that we might be redeemed from it we bless you that you have come to take our death and our sin and penalty to yourself we thank you lord for the reality of that as we seek to remember you in the supper that you instituted for that cause we praise you oh lord that you gave us such means by which to remember those great transactions we do give thanks that we have privilege to be part of that action by which we do remember the death of the lord oh lord humble us we pray when we realize the cost of our redemption humble us we pray as we consider how we are ransomed from the power of death and of sin and of the grave humble us we pray as that we might be exalted in union with yourself grant you blessing to us we pray in these days ahead we pray that you would manifest yourself as the glory in our midst and show yourself oh lord indeed to be that great lord and redeemer of your people hear us now we pray for your glorious sake amen