Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

An Introduction to James, Part 1
Scripture: James 1:1
Code: 59-1

1986

As I mentioned this morning, we come tonight to a long awaited book study for me and I trust for many of you. When we finished the epistle of Paul to the Romans some months ago and I began to put my ear to the ground a little bit and listen to folks making suggestions and writing me notes and letters, far and away, the leading candidate for our next study was the epistle of James. And so that's where we find ourselves tonight.

So open your Bible to the epistle of James. And we're going to be beginning tonight to study these five wonderful chapters in this little epistle that has so much practical, life-changing truth in it. Tonight we're going to just be dealing with the first verse in order to set the scene so that we understand the circumstances, the personality of James, the features that caused him to write this very important letter.

Let me begin by saying the genuineness of something valuable is attested or affirmed through a process of examination and testing. Whether it's gold or silver or precious metals, whether it's diamonds, precious stones or money, anything that is in and of itself of intrinsic value is subjected to testing to affirm its true worth. And the most valuable commodity in all the world is the commodity of eternal salvation. It is priceless. It is of highest value. To have a right relationship with the living God is to possess the most valuable thing in existence. And all those people who believe they have that possession should subject that to a process of testing to determine its validity. There are people, you know, all over the world who if asked whether they have salvation would reply "yes," but who are wrong. We've discussed that many, many times. True salvation needs to be subject to examination, subject to testing. That is a biblical concept, the testing of salvation is throughout Scripture called for.

Listen to some verses. Psalm 17:3, "Thou hast proved my heart. Thou hast visited me in the night, Thou hast tested me." Listen to Psalm 26 verses 1 and 2, "Judge me, O Lord, for I have walked in mine integrity, I have trusted also in the Lord, therefore I shall not slide. Examine me, O Lord, and prove me, test my heart and my mind." And again the psalmist says my relationship to You is subject to testing to determine its validity.

In Psalm 139, I would call your attention to a couple of somewhat familiar verses. "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts and see if there be any wicked way in me

and lead me in the way everlasting," Psalm 139 verses 23 and 24. And here the psalmist actually cries out to God to put his salvation, his relationship to the test.

In Lamentations chapter 3 verse 40, "Let us search and test our ways and turn again to the Lord." Again the writer is calling for the people to subject themselves to the test of the validity of the their relationship to God.

In Ezekiel chapter 18 in verse 28 we find another important verse along this line. "Because he considers, or thinks through, and turns away from all his transgressions that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die." It's because he took stock of his life, it's because he looked carefully at what he was that he has obtained eternal life.

The prophet Haggai, small book, it says in Haggai chapter 1 verse 5, "Now therefore, thus saith the Lord of hosts...listen to this, here's the Word of God...`Consider your ways.'" Then in verse 7 it says the same thing again, "Thus saith the Lord of host, `Consider your ways.'" Think on your life, examine yourself.

And then over in the New Testament we're somewhat familiar, I'm sure, with Galatians chapter 6 and verse 4, "Let every man prove his own work." Put it to the test.

In the familiar 1 Corinthians 11 section that we read so often in connection with the Lord's table we read this, "Let a man examine himself," 1 Corinthians 11:28. "And if we would judge ourselves we wouldn't be judged, but when we are judged we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world." And there again the believer is called upon to examine himself.

In the end of 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Examine yourselves whether you are in the faith." Prove yourselves. Validate yourselves.

In Hebrews, also, just to cover all the ground we can, chapter 4 verse 1, "Let us therefore fear lest a promise being left of us entering into His rest any of you should seem to come short of it." In other words, take careful stock of your life and have a certain amount of healthy fear lest you have been brought to the edge of salvation and not genuinely participated.

Now all of these passages, and others that we could suggest, indicate to us the necessity of self-examination. If, in fact, eternal salvation is the most valuable possession that anyone can have, then it should be subject to a test.

Such testing is also the essence of a very familiar sermon of our Lord. Turn in your Bible to Matthew 5, 6 and 7. The Sermon on the Mount really could be defined as a test of salvation. Jesus proposes a series of tests to those in Israel who believed they were right with God, which tests, by the way,

proved that they in spite of what they thought were not right with God. But He proposes these tests in the Sermon on the Mount. He unmasks their false religion, their hypocritical righteousness, their counterfeit salvation by showing them the truth. And these really are tests.

In the beginning you'll notice, starting in verse 3 and running down through verse 12, are the Beatitudes. The Beatitudes have to do with attitude. Those who are in My Kingdom, He says, are poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, they endure persecution and the antagonism of evil men. And in spite of it all they rejoice and are exceeding glad. Here is the attitude that goes along with true salvation. It is an attitude of meekness, humility, a sense of sinfulness, a sense of crying out for God to give you what you do not possess on your own. This is the mark of true salvation.

The Pharisees of that day when they looked at their lives were proud, boastful, self-sufficient, self-centered, seeking nothing, making trouble and strife. And they, in fact, were the persecutors. Whatever salvation they thought they had didn't pass the test of attitude. They demonstrated all the attitudes that were the antithesis of the attitudes of true salvation.

Then in verses 13 to 16 He shows how true salvation will have a testimony consistent with beatitude virtue. It will be in the world as salt and light. In other words, instead of being an evil influence, it will be a positive righteous influence. True salvation then is a question of your attitude and your influence.

Then in verses 17 to 20 He talks about true salvation being marked by a commitment to the Word of God, a commitment to obey the law of God. And true salvation can be tested by the matter of obedience to the law of God. Of course we know that the Jewish people to whom our Lord spoke came short in their obedience. Their obedience was woefully lacking. They would submit themselves to the laws of men and only reluctantly and when necessary to the laws of God and always outwardly and not often inwardly. Then in verses 21 through 48, the rest of that chapter, Jesus says, "True salvation is manifest by the keeping of righteousness in the heart...in the heart."

So the first test of salvation is your attitude, the second test of salvation is your influence, the third test of salvation is your obedience, and the fourth is the heart righteousness. And He goes through that whole section where He says...On the outside you do this, on the inside you don't. In other words, you say you shouldn't kill but inside you're full of hate. You say you shouldn't commit adultery but on the inside you lust after a woman. You say you shouldn't lie but you have all kinds of oaths which make it very convenient for you to lie within your self-conceived system of tolerance for that. And so all of these things expose the lack of heart righteousness. They had words and deeds but not changed hearts.

Then coming in to chapter 6, the first 18 verses, true salvation can be seen in right worship. How you pray and how you give and how you fast all indicate the genuineness of your salvation or the lack of

genuineness in your salvation. And in chapter 6 the Lord shows that their giving and their praying and their fasting was all filled with hypocrisy and was not the mark of genuine salvation.

True salvation also then after going through verse 18 He starts in verse 19 and goes all the way through verse 34, the end of the sixth chapter, pointing out that true salvation is marked by a right relationship to money and material things. You can test your salvation in lining your life up in regard to your attitude toward money and material things. Is your treasure in heaven or is it all being amassed on the earth?

Coming in to chapter 7 He points out that another test of true salvation which the Jewish people failed was that true salvation involves right relationships, verses 1 to 12. He talks about the necessity for right relationships to mark a true believer.

And then in verses 13 and 14, the narrow way and the broad way, He says..."Now check your salvation out and if you're on the wrong road, then get on the right one. Make the move to the right road." In verses 15 to 20, watch out for the lying prophets who will keep you on the wrong road and realize that you could go all the way down the wrong road, verses 21 to 23, end up in the face of Jesus Christ being kept out of heaven in spite of your profession. And then He closes with an illustration of the judgment of God that comes in the end and those who will survive and those who will not.

Now I just go through that very briefly to let you know that the Sermon on the Mount is basically a test of the genuineness of salvation offered to the Jewish people which they failed. And the right response would have been to say, "We are sinful, we are undone, we have missed the mark. We are without God. We are lost. O help us!" And that would have been the right response. The Jewish establishment failed the test of genuine salvation.

Now that is important for you to see in the Sermon on the Mount because it could well be possible, you can turn now to the epistle of James, it could well be possible that in many ways we can consider the book of James as almost a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. The parallels are very, very significant. All through the book of James you get the feeling that there's the undertone of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is almost the primary teacher, as James articulates his lessons. In many ways, then, James is a practical commentary of application of the Sermon on the Mount. And his goal, by the way, is the same as that of Jesus, to convince his audience that their religion and their religious profession and their religious activities will not benefit them at all unless they manifest true godliness from the heart. That's what James is after. And it's my belief that the whole epistle of James is nothing but a series...nothing other than a series of tests for the genuineness of salvation, start to finish. He wants to show us the character, mark this, of living faith...the character of living faith. What is true, genuine, living faith?

This was Jesus' concern. This is James' concern. And might I add, because I want you to understand how important this is, we saw verses in the Old Testament on examining yourself. We saw verses in the New Testament. We note that that's the emphasis of the Sermon on the Mount. We say that it's the emphasis of James. I want to remind you, for a moment, turn with me to 1 John and you will find that in this wonderful epistle of 1 John, John is greatly concerned about the matter of valid saving faith. He is concerned about a true child of God being tested and proven. And he gives, starting in chapter 1, that very indication. Verse 6, "If we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth. If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and still righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His Word is not in us."

Now what John is contrasting here is the people who say and the people who do, the "if we sayers" and the "if we doers," if you will. What he is saying here is it doesn't matter what you say, it only matters what you do. If you say you have fellowship but you walk in darkness, you lie. And so how a person is related to sin is an indicator of the genuineness, or the lack of it, regarding their salvation. Notice chapter 2 verse 3, "By this we know we know Him if we keep His commandments," and here's the test of obedience. Again, John's purpose is very similar also to the Sermon on the Mount. “If we keep His commandments we demonstrate that we know Him. He that says I know Him and doesn't keep His commandments, he's a liar and the truth isn't in him." Just like the guy in chapter 1 who said he walks in the fellowship but he really walks in the darkness. He's a liar, too.

It doesn't matter what you say, you have to be tested the way you live, the things you do. "Whosoever keeps His Word in him, verily is the love of God perfected. By this we know we are in Him," it says in verse 5. And all the way down, you come in to verse 9, "He that says he's in the light and hates his brothers is in darkness. He that loves his brother abides in light. There's no occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hates his brother is in darkness and walks in darkness and doesn't know where he goes because darkness has blinded his eyes." So it's a question of your relation to sin, your relation to the law of God, your relation to loving your brother. All of those things are tests of the genuineness of saving faith.

Over in verse 15 he gives another test. "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." Again another test. In verse 29, as he moves through, "If you know that He is righteous...that is Christ...then you know that everyone that does righteousness is born of Him." Again, the test of a righteous life."

Chapter 3 verse 6, "Whosoever abides in Him doesn't continue in the pattern of sin. Whoever sins hasn't seen Him or known Him." Again, the test of the life whether there is a dominant factor of sin or

righteousness. Verse 9, "Whosoever is born of God doesn't continue to commit same patterns of sin. God's seed remains in him, he cannot sin in that way because he's born of God." And down in verse 14, "We know that we have passed from death to life." How? "Because we love the brethren...we love the brethren." Verse 24, "He that keeps His commandments dwells in Him and He in him." He just keeps going back over the same thing. In fact, some believe that John has to be outlined in a series of circles because he tracks back through the same truth.

But the essential teaching of 1 John, then, is a series of tests by which you examine yourself to see if you're genuinely saved. Now I want you to understand that all of this, in a sense, goes back to an initial moment in the teaching of Jesus when in the Sermon on the Mount He said the day will come when people will say to Me, "Lord, Lord, we did this and we did that, and we did the other thing." And I will say to them, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." And God knows that there are people who have the illusion of being a Christian. They have the illusion of being saved. And so, in the Sermon on the Mount a test is given. In the epistle of James a series of tests is given. In 1 John a series of tests is given. And may I also say to you that even in 2 Peter chapter 1 a series of tests is given? Where it says, "If you add to your faith virtue and then knowledge and then self-control and patience and godliness and brotherly kindness and love, if these things be in you, you will not be blind and you will not forget that you were purged from your old sins. You will make your calling and election sure." In other words, you'll know you're saved when you see the pattern of virtue in your life. And again, Peter is concerned to place a test for people to measure their salvation by.

Now with that in mind we return again to James and we note that James is going to give us from chapter 1 to chapter 5 a series of tests as to the validity of salvation. Verbal, intellectual assent to the truth is useless unless there is the demonstration of a transformed life that is marked by righteousness. And intellectual perfunctory, ritualistic, external religiosity without the evidence of a transformed life style frankly is an abomination to God and very common.

Let's pick up some of the notes in James that tell us this. Chapter 1 verse 22, "But be ye...what?...doers of the Word and not...what?...hearers only because if you're a hearer only you're doing...what?...you're deceiving your own selves." Chapter 2 verse 13, "He shall receive judgment without mercy that has shown no mercy." In other words, you're going to be judged without mercy if in your life you demonstrated no mercy, which was an indicator that you possessed no mercy granted by God, that you were not obviously a believer. Verse 17, "Faith if it has not works is dead, it's useless." Verse 20, "Faith without works is dead." Verse 26, "Faith without works is dead." Three times. It doesn't matter what you claim. It doesn't matter what you perform on the outside, the absence of truly righteous deeds betrays an unredeemed heart.

In chapter 3 verse 13, "Who is a wise man? Who is a man endued with knowledge among you? Let him show out of a good life his works with meekness of wisdom." Let him show it. Let it be made manifest in the way he lives.

Chapter 4 verse 4, "You adulterers and adulteresses, do you not know that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God." Another test. The worldliness sounds almost like a parallel passage to 1 John 2:15, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

And then in verse 8 he calls in an invitation to people who fail the test and says, "Draw near to God and He'll draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, purify your hearts, you double-minded," you people holding on to the world and holding on to religion. You see, James wants the reader to put his faith to the test.

Now it's curious to me as we think about some of these introductory things, it is curious to me that James does not deal with the essence of salvation. There's nothing in here about the crucifixion of Christ or His resurrection, nothing about the deity of Christ, nothing about justification, nothing about regeneration. These things aren't mentioned at all because they are assumed...they are assumed. It's very clear that he is writing to people who say they believe. In verse 2 he calls them "my brethren." And they were brethren not only in race but they were brethren in the claim to faith. He calls them "my brethren" at the beginning of chapter 2. He calls them "my brethren" at the beginning of chapter 3. He calls them brethren several times. He even calls them "my beloved brethren." So the underlying assumption here is that you have people who make a claim to a faith in Christ. He doesn't explain what it is to be a Christian because that is assumed that these are the people who claim that. The readers already have that knowledge. But what James is saying is, it won't benefit you eternally unless there's clear evidence that your salvation is the real thing.

So James desires then to show the character of living faith. One writer puts it this way, "His chief aim is plainly to impress his readers with a conviction that true Christianity is always a great moral power and will therefore reveal itself through growth in the energies and beauties of holiness," so said Robert Johnstone. Let me read that last part again, "It will always reveal itself through growth in the energies and beauties of holiness." Saving faith always flows out in good works.

Some people have said, "Well, James is in conflict with Paul." Not at all...not at all. To Paul the question was this, "How is salvation received?" In the book of Romans Paul was asking and answering that question, "How is salvation received?" And Paul's answer was always by faith alone. But to James the question is, "How is salvation verified?" And his answer always is, "By works alone." It is received by faith, it is verified by works. There's no conflict there, there's perfect harmony...perfect harmony.

Now with that understanding of the overall intent of the book, let's look at verse 1 and meet the author...James. And that's all it says. "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting." James, the Greek, “Iakobo,” it's really the word

"Jacob." James is the same as Jacob. This was a very common name in first century Palestine. Eventually it came to be James in English because it kind of lost its original identity in the translation of Latin. “Iakobo” became “Iakobos” and “Iakobos” became “Iakomos” and “Iakomos” became James in the English transliteration. And so what started as Jacob ended up James.

We ask the question then, who is this James? All it says is James, it doesn't tell us any other descriptive thing about him except the general statement that he served God and the Lord Jesus Christ and that doesn't help identify him. Who is he? What James are we talking about?

Well we have four choices, really, four good choices in the New Testament. Let me remind you what they are. There is James the son of Alphaeus. You say, "Who's that?" Well he was one of the Twelve. If you read Matthew 10 you'll see his name, read Luke 1 you'll see his name, you'll see his name wherever you see a list of disciples. James the son of Alphaeus. We don't know anything about him. The only thing we can sort of assume about him is that he may have been the brother of Matthew. In the gospel of Mark chapter 2 verse 14 it says, "Matthew who's also known as Levi, was the son of Alphaeus." If it's the same Alphaeus then James and Matthew were indeed brothers. We don't know anything about James the son of Alphaeus. He was there. He was one of the apostles. He went out to preach the gospel and served Christ and he'll reign over the twelve tribes of Israel and he'll have a wonderful place in eternity and it will be nice to find out about him when we get there. He's just one of those mystery men. There really is no reason to believe that he wrote this epistle. We have no evidence for that and there doesn't seem to be any reason to credit him as the author of the epistle. It's not an impossibility that he wrote it, but there is no reason to assume that he did.

Second James that we might look at is James the father of Judas. In Luke 6:16 it mentions James the father of Judas, Judas not Iscariot, the other apostle named Judas. But he's a very obscure James and there's no reason to credit him with writing this epistle either. We know absolutely nothing about him.

The third James, and the one perhaps most familiar to all of us, is James the son of Zebedee and the older brother of the Apostle John. James and John we know about. They originally were "Boanerges, the sons of thunder," volatile men, men of great...what should we say?...excitement, intensity. We know about James, he was one of the Twelve. We know about him even more than that, he was one of the inner three of Peter, James and John. He was called by our Lord from fishing in Matthew 4:17 to 22, and he was told that he would be made into a fisher of men. He was the first apostle to be martyred. He wasn't the first martyr, Stephen was, but he was the first apostle to be martyred. Acts 12:2 tells about his martyrdom. He is a very stimulating and exciting character in the New Testament.

It is interesting to me that he never appears ever in the biblical record apart from his brother, John. He never appears alone, except in his martyrdom. In the gospel record he always appears in company with John.

Now since he lost his head so early by Acts 12, it would be an impossibility for him to have written this epistle. He would have been in glory by this time.

Now that leaves us with one other James who is the best candidate for authorship, and that is James the brother of our Lord. When our Lord Jesus came into this world, His mother was a virgin. But after the birth of Christ, she went on with her husband Joseph to bear children, male and female, and one of those, most likely the oldest son, was named James.

Now to meet him, let's look together at Galatians chapter 1. And I want to give you a little bit of introduction to a rather unfamiliar person in the New Testament. James 1...pardon me, Galatians 1 mentions James in verse 19. Galatians 1:19 says, "But other of the apostles saw I none." Paul is giving testimony to not having seen the apostles. He did see James, verse 19 says, the Lord's brother James, the Lord's brother. We learn then that this indeed was the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We also learn in chapter 2 verse 9 about him, "When James, Peter and John," and this would be James, not the brother of John, but James the brother of our Lord, "who seemed to be, or who were esteemed to be pillars." He is here called a pillar in the church, along with Peter and John. He was a man of great stature, of great reputation, a pillar in the church that is a great strength, a stronghold that holds up the church.

Now let's find out a little bit about this man who had come to be a pillar in the church who was our Lord's brother. We have to go back to Matthew chapter 1 and we're going to take a little brief tour through the gospel so you can get as much as there is about James. I want you to just note that in Matthew 1:18 Jesus was born and before Mary was ever related to Joseph in any sexual contact at all, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then in verse 25, Joseph knew her not through all the time of her pregnancy, until she had brought forth...and here's the key word...her firstborn son. And the use of the descriptive term "firstborn" implies that she had more sons than just Jesus. He was the firstborn. If he was the only one it would have been very, very easy to say "her only son." But only her firstborn for there were many others. Luke 2:7 records the same thing.

Look with me at Mark chapter 6 verse 3, and here we get a little deeper into the story of our Lord and we read this, "When Jesus went to Nazareth and did all that He did, the people commented by saying, verse 3, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joseph and Judas and Simon and are not His sisters here with us? And they were offended at Him." Who does He think He is coming off as if He was the Messiah when everybody knows He's a carpenter and His mother is Mary and His brothers are James and Joseph and Judas and Simon and His sisters here and we're offended that He would ever make such bizarre claims. Again, I note for you that the name James appears first in the list which is usually an indicator of being the older of the others, and that's why I said I think next to the Lord he would be the oldest son in the family. But clearly the Bible says

these were the brothers of the Lord Jesus. Also, you find in Matthew 13:55 a similar indication, you don't need to turn to it.

Now remember, these were half-brothers and half-sisters in the sense that Jesus was the child of Mary, but virgin born, not the child of Joseph. But nonetheless, they were considered, of course, to be brothers in life to Him

Now go back for a moment to Mark chapter 3. Jesus in this particular setting was teaching some people in a house and there came His brother and His mother standing outside. And they said unto Him, calling Him. They sent a message in to get Jesus out. "And the multitude sat about Him and said, `Behold, Your mother and your brothers outside seek for You.' And He answered them saying, `Who is My mother or My brethren?' And He looked around about on those who sat about Him and said, `Behold, My mother and My brethren, for whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother or My sister and mother.'" He takes the opportunity of His mother and brothers coming after Him to teach about true relationships to Him which are on the spiritual level. You'll find a parallel to that in Luke 8:19, a parallel in John 2:12 and also Matthew 12:46 and 47. Now all of those passages mention Jesus' brothers. Apparently they thought He was a little bit crazy, that He was acting in a way that would bring dishonor on the family and they went to get Him back to try to control Him. His brothers did not believe in Him and they sought probably to cease from being embarrassed by the things that He was doing with His bizarre behavior among the crowds.

Now look at John 7 verse 3, and here we have a very straightforward comment on where His brothers were in spiritual perception. It says in verse 3, "His brothers therefore said to Him, `Depart from here and go into Judea that Thy disciples also may see the works that Thou doest for there is no man that doeth anything in secret and he himself seeks to be known openly, if Thou do these things, show Thyself to the world.'" Go down there from Galilee to Judea and do Your thing and let it be proven if you really are from God. Verse 5, "For neither did His brothers believe in Him." They didn't believe in Him, too close to home. If a prophet is without honor in his own country, you can only imagine what it would be like in his own family. His brothers did not believe in Him.

They thought He was crazy. They wanted to stop His bizarre behavior. Here they had lived with Him from a child and they didn't believe in Him, which is probably a good indication that some of the legends about Jesus aren't true, that He went around raising dead birds and healing sick animals and creating miracles of food and making beautiful sunsets and you read all of this in fictitious writings. If all of that was true, we would imagine that His brothers would have believed, but the fact is He never began His miracles. It says the beginning of His miracles was the changing of water to wine at Cana, prior to that time there's no indication, in fact, there's plenty of indication otherwise that He did any miracles at all. So His brothers would have had to believe the claims that He made, which also were not that strong until He began His ministry, and then they found it all incredulous because they had been raised with Jesus. And furthermore, it would be very difficult to maintain anything but a jealous

attitude toward your perfect brother who never sinned. You can only imagine the intimidation of that and how many times they said, "Why doesn't Jesus ever get a spanking?" He never did.

In Acts 1:14 we come to the next step in the process of understanding where James fits into the picture. And here we find in the Upper Room gathered those who believed in Christ after His resurrection. He has ascended into heaven and they are all there in prayer. The apostles are there, and not only the apostles but verse 14 says the women were there, those women that attended Christ in His death, Mary the mother of Jesus was there, and His brothers were there, Judas and Joseph and Simon and James were there.

What happened? How is it that His brothers were there? First Corinthians 15:7 gives us the answer. First Corinthians 15:7, it says that this is the gospel, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, was buried, that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures, He was seen by Peter then the Twelve, seen by 500 brethren. And then verse 7, "After that He was seen by James, then all the apostles."

Interesting. Jesus revealed Himself to James in a personal post-resurrection revelation. And that is precisely why James and the other brothers appear in the Upper Room in Acts chapter 1 because they have seen the resurrected Christ, at least James has, and they now believe...they believe. So James has come all the way to faith in his brother, the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, through a post-resurrection revelation. Now James finds himself with the apostles, he finds himself with the women in the Upper Room. He is waiting for the anointing of the Spirit of God on the day of Pentecost. He is in the mainstream of the founding of the church and it isn't long before he becomes a very, very important part of the church.

You say, "Well what about the other brothers of Christ? Do we have any indication of the strength of their faith?" Yes, Jude, the epistle Jude, do you remember what it says? "Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ and brother of James." Here is another brother of our Lord, also not one of the twelve apostles, who wrote an epistle, who came to faith also in Christ after His resurrection. So you have two New Testament epistles written by the brothers of our Lord...one being Jude, or Judas, the other being James.

Now we learn more about James. If you're in 1 Corinthians you might go back to chapter 9 and verse 5 and here we find Paul talking about his rights as an apostle and he says, "Have we no right to lead about a sister, that is a Christian sister, as a wife as well as the other apostles and as the brethren of the Lord and Peter?" The indication there is that James and the brothers of the Lord also were married. So now we find James has come to faith. Jude has come to faith. They, no doubt, have married. They are in the mainstream of the life of the church.

Now what happens to James? Does he have some gifts that will bring him to special prominence? Acts chapter 12, let's find out. Acts chapter 12 and verse 17, Peter, you remember, was in prison and they were having a prayer meeting about his release and when he was released and banging on the door, you remember the maid went to the door and said, "You can't be here, you're in prison." And they weren't really exercising great faith in the process of their prayer. But Peter continued knocking while the people said it must be an angel. They told the girl she was crazy, even though they were praying for his release. "Peter continued knocking and when they had opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. But he beckoning unto them with a hand to hold their peace, saying quiet, declared to them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison." And this is what he said, "Go show these things to...whom?...to James and to the brethren, and he departed and went to another place."

Well now all of a sudden, the last time we saw James, James was just meeting in the Upper Room, now he's the focal point of the church at Jerusalem and when there's any important news it is to go to James. James, if we can borrow a contemporary term, has become senior pastor of the First Church at Jerusalem. It's understandable. You can imagine what renown he had as the brother of the Lord Jesus, can't you? You can imagine what renown he has now as having had a personal vision of the resurrected Christ. And so he is the one who all of a sudden appears in a very prominent position.

Look at Acts 15. Acts 15. Now there is in Acts 15 a council held in the church in Jerusalem. They have some decisions to make. Why? Well, this is really the only church in many ways that has any history. This is the mother church. Paul has been out there evangelizing the Gentiles. Paul comes back with Barnabas, they give a report of what the Lord is doing, they tell about the problem they're having in the Jewish community because there are some Jews who are holding so fast to Moses and the law. And so they have a council about how to deal with this matter of evangelism to Jews and Gentiles. And I want you to notice who presides over the council, verse 13. "And after they held their peace," they had listened to Barnabas and Paul in verse 12, telling him everything God was doing in the Gentile world, "and they held their peace, James answered," why? Because James was responsible to answer. He again is seen as the key person in the church. He says, "Men and brethren, listen to me." James presides over the Jerusalem Council. He leads in the decision about Gentile evangelism, about avoiding legalism. He helps compose a letter to the Gentile churches to tell them to be very cautious in the way they exercise their freedom so they don't offend the Jews and thus lose the opportunity to reach them for Christ. He tells them in that letter, of course, that the Jews are very scrupulous, they have many very, very constraining laws and ceremonies and the Gentile church must take great care to maintain their testimony among those people.

So all of a sudden James is the one that the report goes to. James is the one leading the council in Jerusalem. Go to the twenty-first chapter of Acts and here for the last time we see James. Paul is coming back from his missionary journey. He's coming back with an offering to take to the poor saints in the church in Jerusalem. He comes with that offering which expresses love from Gentile churches. He brings the offering, along with some Gentiles who came with him, in an effort to conciliate the

Jewish church in Jerusalem with the Gentile churches. There was so much animosity between those two peoples in the world and Christ certainly could bring them together as one, that was His desire. And so Paul wanting to conciliate brings these Gentiles along with their gift of money to relieve the poverty in the Jerusalem church.

And when they came to Jerusalem, verse 17 says, "The brethren received us gladly and the day following Paul went in with us unto James." And again we see James in a presiding role. And I want to enforce to you that no matter what you have in the local church in terms of a plurality of elders, you will still have some leaders over leaders. And you have here, in the case of James, a man in a presiding position. And all the elders were present. You have all of the elders being present and yet you have James in the responsibility of presiding. And so the report was given to him, the declaration of what God had done, verse 19, among the Gentiles was given to him again. And they all glorified the Lord and said to him, "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are who believe? They're all zealous of the law." And then he goes in to this discussion with them. So again we see the importance of James.

Now let me just say that tradition tells us that James was martyred in 62 A.D., the brother of our Lord. Not James the apostle, he was martyred in Acts 12, very early. Sixty-two A.D., tradition says, we don't have any record in the Bible of the death of James, our Lord's brother. But that's the introduction to the man.

Now the question comes, what makes us think he wrote the epistle? Well, as I told you, James the son of Alphaeus is very obscure. James the father of Judas, even more obscure. James the son of Zebedee, and older brother of John, is dead. And that really leaves us with James the brother of our Lord. Jude didn't mind identifying himself as the brother of James. It would only have been wished that James could have been able to identify himself as the brother of Jude, and thus solved all of our discussion, but he didn't. So why do we think he wrote the epistle? You can go back to the epistle for a few moments.

Well, first of all, by analyzing the text of the epistle and what we assume to be in the author's mind as we read through it, it is obvious that this is before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and is surely before the Council of Jerusalem around 50 A.D. It is also apparent that because he writes, verse 1, to twelve tribes of Jews scattered and because those Jews must be believing Jews, as we see throughout the letter, that it had to be after the scattering of the church in Jerusalem. The scattering of the church in Jerusalem took place as a result of the events of Acts 7 and 8. In Acts 7 Stephen was stoned. In Acts 8 Paul starts breathing out threatening and slaughter against the church and the church scatters. That happens somewhere around 35 to 37 A.D. So between 35 to 37 when the church was scattered and 50 when the Council of Jerusalem took place where James presided, somewhere in that gap this epistle is written. That fits the time frame of the leadership of James.

If you go far enough after the year 35, it would give time for the church to settle out there and to have some struggles and problems to which James speaks. And if you get close enough to the year 50, James will have reached the position of leadership and authority that we see him in when Peter reports to him in chapter 12, or sends a message to him, and when he presides in Acts 15. So somewhere around the mid 40's is a very likely time for the writing of this epistle and that fits perfectly the leadership of James, the brother of our Lord, in the church in Jerusalem. That also, by the way, makes this the earliest New Testament book. The Jewish nature of this book shows that it is established before the founding of the Gentile churches. It is a very Jewish epistle.

So James, our Lord's brother, would have had the respect of the church. He obviously rose to leadership in the church. He had the awesome privilege of seeing the risen Christ and therefore seems a very likely candidate for the author of this epistle. Furthermore, the fact that he identifies himself only as James means that he must have been James the most well-known James, James who needs no other introduction. And that would have been true only of James the brother of our Lord, the leader of the Jerusalem church so well known that no further indication of who he was, was at all compelling.

And then another thought that I had too. If you study the Greek text of James, you will note that it is some of the finest Greek in all of the New Testament, perhaps only equaled in literary character by the epistle to the Hebrews. And that leads us to believe that very likely the James that wrote this was not only very conversant in the language of the Jewish people, Aramaic, but also in the language of the rest of the world, Greek. And that is likely an indication that he came from Galilee because Galilee was densely populated by Gentiles and it was the focal point for Gentile commerce whereas Jerusalem was a very Jewish city and the typical Jewish or Aramaic style of vernacular would have been more characteristic of one from that area. James, the brother of our Lord, of course, was raised with Jesus in Galilee and fits that as well.

So all of those kinds of things lead us to the assumption that James is the author. Now let me go a step further, and this is just for those of you who are very deeply into studying these kinds of things in the Scripture. If you compare the epistle of James with Acts 15 where James presides and where James, no doubt, was very much a part of the composing of the letter that was written, you will find the parallels in language are very, very clear. For example, you will find in the epistle of James and also in Acts 15 the use of the word "greeting," which is a somewhat uncommon word. In fact, only two New Testament documents use that word to begin. One is the epistle of James and the other is the letter of Acts 15. That was James', perhaps, common greeting. Then you compare the epistle of James with the letter of Acts 15 verse 25 and you will note the use of the word "beloved," which James uses in both places. You check the fifth chapter of James and the fifteenth chapter and the nineteenth verse of the letter in Acts 15, fifteenth chapter and nineteenth verse, and you will note the use of the verb "to turn" as a descriptive of salvation, to turn. You find also the use of the word "to

visit." You find the phrase "your souls." You find this important phrase "the name by which you are called," or "upon whom my name is called." You find the name "keep yourselves" in both those letters, the epistle of James and Acts 15. So the parallel language is another strong indication that this is indeed the same man who led the council in Acts 15, and furthermore, tradition which means this has been the typical historical belief of the church has assigned it to James.

Now what kind of man was he? All that data aside, what kind of man was he? Have you read the book of James? You read it through a few times you'll get the idea. He, somebody called him "a man characterized by volcanic energy." His sentences are very short, very forceful, very direct, very compact, very prophetic in tone, very authoritative and yet warmly pastoral. He's different than Paul. Paul brings up an issue and then Paul's got to explore everything in it. He's got to cover every base, all sides of an issue. Takes a close look at every facet, sweeps over the widest range, plunges to the deepest depths, deals with all responses and all reactions. Not James. Very narrow, very directed, very powerful, very conviction oriented. He just blasts the target and moves on to something else and doesn't deal with what the response might be. In this little epistle of fifty, pardon me, five chapters, there are fifty imperative form verbs. He just commands right through this epistle.

James is black and white. He's like John. John, everything is black and white with John. James is black and white but the difference is, John is black and white about concepts, James is black and white about application. John is black and white about theological issues; James is black and white about the matters of living. Brief, pointed, his material hits like arrows to the target.

Furthermore, looking beyond just his character, his spirituality. What was the nature of his spirituality? Well as you look at this epistle you remind yourself that this is a deeply spiritual man. In fact, tradition calls him "James the righteous," or "James the Just," and they said he was so holy, in fact crazy things grew up about him in legends...they said "his knees were like the knees of camels, they had been worn callous like camels' knees because of his much praying." Some writer said he was so holy he was holy from his mother's womb, wine and strong drink he drank not, neither did he eat flesh, no razor touched his head, he anointed himself not with oil and never used the bath. I really doubt whether the Jerusalem Council would have lasted more than about ten minutes if that was true...unless it was held on a windy hill, with the wind blowing in the right direction.

But, you know, when you get a person in the Bible who is unique, who is righteous, tradition has a way of embellishing him with all kinds of fanciful things. But he was a holy man. He was a humble man. He was a powerful man. His humility can be seen right here in the way he introduces himself. Now how could he have introduced himself? "James, the brother of the Lord Jesus Christ the Messiah, the holy one of God of Israel, and the one who personally with my own eyes saw the risen Christ. Thank you very much." But you don't see that. It's just James. I like that...humility.

He obviously understands worldly issues. He understands the character of evil men. He understands selfishness. He understands superficiality. He has very strong convictions. He writes without fear and he writes without compromise. He doesn't deal with exceptions. He doesn't explain fully what he says, that's why many things in this book just leave you cold, pinned against the wall, and you say, "But...but...but what about this and what about that?" And that's not his issue. Yet he is tender. He has great sympathy for poor people. He is righteously angry at anybody who abuses the poor. He has no tolerance for respect of persons. He has great sensitivity to unconverted Jews who might be offended by some people exercising their Christian liberty. His courage can be seen by the fact that he died as a martyr for his own brother, and his Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is a man of spiritual quality, a godly man with courage and such a good reputation.

Now what about his knowledge? Did he know much? Well he must have. This is not a theological book and some people say there's no theology in James. That's wrong. It's loaded with it, you just have to look closely. But the range of his understanding is really marvelous. It has a wealth of theology. There are five specific Old Testament quotes and a literal plethora of Old Testament references that are made sort of vaguely. He really understands the Old Testament and it just flows out of him. He demonstrates a complete mastery of the truth of the Sermon on the Mount. The parallels, I counted up at least a half a dozen direct parallels to the Sermon on the Mount which shows he understood the heart of Christ.

James gives us theology. He writes probably the most significant New Testament theology of suffering. He gives us the theology of sin. He gives us the theology of temptation, the theology of fallenness. He gives us the theology of demonic evil. He gives us the theology of Christ. He uses the word “kurios” eleven times, Jesus is Lord to James and he even calls Him "the Lord of glory." He reveals Christ as the One who is the source of wisdom in chapter 1, the One before whom all men are humbled in chapter 4, the One who controls all history and human destiny in chapter 4 and 5, the One who is the coming King in chapter 5, the One who is the healer in chapter 5.

He not only has a strong Christology, but a strong theology proper. He explains God to us. He uses the name "God," “theos,” seventeen times. He reveals God as one God, as the Creator God, as the source of righteousness, as the object of worship, as the guide in true wisdom, as sovereign, as the opposer of the world, as the enemy of sin, as the leader of heaven's hosts and the judge of all, as the gracious receiver of all who repent. And he has the theology of law and the theology of grace and the theology of faith and wisdom and the theology of prayer. And he even has a rather primitive but fully clear ecclesiology, or his theology of the church. He sees the church as a group of people who love each other. He uses the term "beloved." He talks about it being a fellowship of rich and poor. Its greatest asset being faith. He says no one should have a need there, tongues must be guarded, heavenly wisdom must rule. There must be true oneness. He refers to the elders of the church and talks about the mutual ministry of praying for one another. So he had a very developed theology.

And then finally, what kind of a ministry did James have? Well, as I've been saying, he was a leader of the church in Jerusalem. But he had a kind of a unique situation because part of that congregation of that church had been scattered by persecution and they were all over everyplace. We see some of them in Acts 8, don't we in the ministry of Philip? And all over they went. And so in a sense part of his congregation was gone and it's my conviction that he wrote this epistle to those people who really were in his care but were scattered by the persecution. He writes in fulfillment of his pastoral duty to people he can't touch personally, he sends this letter.

And by the way, he doesn't even address it to anybody specific. If this went to the Post Office, they would return it because of an insufficient address. He just sort of sent it out and it must have been his hope that it would reach to as many possible and surely by God's grace and since it was authored by the Holy Spirit, it would have reached the whole church. He led the church in a very tense time. His leadership was crucial. Here was the church emerging out of Judaism. Here was the church entangled with all the ceremonies. Here were many of the members of the church still going to the temple and going through all the temple activities and all the temple festivals and all of that was still holding them. And they were trying to make a transition to freedom. And here was the church burgeoning out to reach Gentiles and warning in the process to show them liberty in Christ and yet not offend scrupulous Jews. Here was a time of confusion over law and grace. Here was a time of transition, a time of persecution, a very difficult time, very difficult.

He had a marvelous ministry, leading the Jerusalem Council to write that letter and establish the standard of evangelism so as not to offend the Jews was crucial. In Galatians chapter 2 he with Peter recognized the credentials of Paul and validated that Paul was truly converted from being a persecutor to being a preacher of Christ, the very same man who had scattered the church was now a preacher of the Christ he persecuted. And James recognized that in him. James had that discernment and that perception.

We never see James moving out, we never see him leaving Jerusalem. He's not an apostle, he's never called an apostle. He's never a "sent one." He stayed there. He's the first model pastor. He obviously maintained a Jewish life style. He was loyal to Jewish heritage. We would say in today's vernacular, he wasn't a Judaizer and he wasn't a legalist, but he was kosher. And we see that and that was so that he wouldn't offend the people in Jerusalem where he had to preach, where he had to reach them. He was becoming, like Paul said, all things to all men that by any means he might win some. To the Jews Paul became a Jew. And certainly since that's the environment James was in, he held on to that. Very special man.

He says of himself, "A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." I love that. He doesn't say, "I'm the leader of the church. James the leader of the church, the pastor of the first church, the brother of the Messiah," no, he doesn't say that. He is just a humble man. "Humble yourself in the sight of the

Lord and He will lift you up," he says in chapter 4 verse 10, and he practiced what he preached. “Doulos” is the word "servant," it means "one who is deprived of personal freedom, one who is fully come into the control of his master." It's from the verb "to bind," he is bound. He is a slave by birth, “doulos,” not “andrapodon” which means a slave, you're made a slave. “Doulos” means a slave from birth. He was born into slavery by faith in Christ. He was born a slave. A “doulos” had no concern for his food, no concern for his clothing, no concern for his housing. His master cared for all of that. That was James. William Barclay says a “doulos” was characterized by absolute obedience, absolute humility, absolute loyalty and pride, in a good sense, he was proud to be a servant. It wasn't a title of dishonor; it was a title of honor, especially to a Jew.

You know, in the Old Testament Moses was called "the “doulos” of God." Daniel was called "the “doulos” of God," Joshua and Caleb, "the “doulos” of God," Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so was Job, so was Isaiah and other of the prophets. And when James calls himself “doulos,” he is identifying himself with many honored men who were the servants of God. He says nothing about his human relationship to Christ, only about his spiritual service rendered. This is James.

Well, he has two masters, God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and we'll talk a little more about that next time. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, it's refreshing to meet this man most of us have not known before now. And yet he plays such a prominent part in the Kingdom. He's a reminder, Lord, of how You use men and women who are faithful and humble and holy for Your purpose. Thank You for what he was, for what he wrote under Your inspiration, for what he will become to us as we grow to love him and to sit as his feet and be taught. And, Father, may it be that we hear with hearing ears, we see with seeing eyes that our hearts respond to all that he will say who has proven to be a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ and shall for many weeks and months to come be our teacher. Thank You for the example of his life. Thank You for bringing him to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, thank You for gifting and endowing him so that he can be for us an example, for bringing him to leadership in Your church for we see in him the picture of us. O we're not so blessed as he, but we can be used as well. Thank You that You're still calling men and women to unique service and that those like James that served You so well and learned so many lessons can be our teachers, to that end we pray that we might render greater service for Christ's sake. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).