

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

James: The Brother of Our Lord

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-394

We have been doing a series along the last few months on Sunday nights from a book that I wrote called *Twelve Unlikely Heroes*, and it is a book that is designed to demonstrate what God can do with very unlikely, very flawed, very weak people. We have gone through a long list and we only have a few more. Tonight we're going to be looking at James, the brother of our Lord, and then next Sunday night we'll look at the final two: Mark who wrote the gospel of Mark, and Onesimus--Onesimus being a runaway slave, and their lives intersected in a most remarkable way.

Certainly James, the brother of our Lord, is an unlikely hero. And he is in a spiritual sense a hero. We're talking about spiritual heroism that is amazing and powerful, spiritual impact and influence that extends far beyond what one would assume based on what we know to be true about a certain individual. We're talking about spiritual heroism being used mightily of God.

And I find James, the brother of our Lord, to be one of the more interesting characters in the New Testament because of the relationship that he had with the Lord Jesus. Ask yourself, "What would it have been like to live in the same house and grow up in the same family as the Lord Jesus? What was it like for His brothers and sisters?" The question is not hypothetical; the question is actual. For His brothers and sisters living with the incarnate God was a daily reality. And in spite of the traditional claims made by the Roman Catholic Church, Mary was not a perpetual virgin. She was a virgin when she conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and gave birth to Jesus. But after giving birth to Jesus, she had a normal relationship with her husband Joseph that led to her giving birth to at least six more children, and perhaps even more.

If you look at Luke chapter 2, verse 7, you would find that she had a son called Jesus, who was her firstborn son. And that in itself implies that she had others. In Matthew 13 and in Mark 6, her other sons are named. There was James, Joses, Simon, and Jude. These same passages, Matthew 13 and Mark 6, also indicate that Jesus had multiple sisters, though their names are not given. Jewish families in the ancient times were large--typically large families. The family of Joseph and Mary was no exception. And though Jesus is the only begotten Son of God, He is not the only begotten son of Mary. There are seven or more children, five boys, including Jesus, and at least two girls, and very likely more living in the house of Joseph and Mary as any family would for all their young lives.

Jesus, while being the true son of Mary, was not Joseph's biological son, so His brothers and sisters were half-brothers and half-sisters, but they lived together from birth as a family. He lived with the

family as the earthly son of Mary and Joseph. His brothers were a part of His daily life, as were His sisters, all the way until He developed into manhood.

And, in fact, He didn't embark upon His public ministry until He was age thirty, and up to that time He did what most adult children did, He lived with or in approximation to His family and He worked with His father as the son of a carpenter in the small village of Nazareth. He lived until the age of thirty in and around the siblings which had been there all along.

One of those is a man named James, James. And the question that we ask in this little look at James tonight is, What was it like for James to grow up in the same family with a perfectly righteous brother, the divine Son of God? So let's look at the first little view of James. We'll call him the unbelieving brother, the unbelieving brother.

Now there are all kinds of bizarre legends and apocryphal accounts about Jesus as a child. There are mythical stories about how as a little boy He miraculously and instantly purified contaminated water. There are stories about how He made clay sparrows and then spoke life to them and they flew away. There is apocryphal literature about how Jesus was sad about a playmate who died, so He raised him from the dead. How He healed a woodcutter's injured limb. As we know, woodcutters can sometimes injure themselves. There's a story about Him miraculously healing a woodcutter's injury.

There's another story about how Jesus had one grain of wheat in His hand and from that He managed to create a hundred bushels of wheat. There's another story about the fact that they were building something in Joseph's carpenter shop and somebody, not Jesus, maybe James, had wrongly measured the wood and so it didn't fit. And Jesus miraculously lengthened it. There is another story in apocryphal literature about Jesus raising one of His teachers from the dead, and specifically healing James from a potentially fatal snake bite.

In one account, the young Jesus is pictured being surrounded by lions and leopards who are worshipping Him. In another, He can't quite reach fruit in a tree, and so He commands the tree to bend down its branches to make its fruit more accessible. According to such legends and other bizarre superstitions did all these miracles, one writer says, to spice up the rather pedestrian life of Nazareth. Make it a little more exciting.

None of that, by the way, is in the Bible. All of that is fabrication. Growing up, Jesus appeared in every way to be like every other child in town and every other child in that family. In Luke it says the child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom and the grace of God was upon Him. The child grew. We know He grew in wisdom, stature--favor with God, favor with man. With each passing year His body and His mind continued to develop, and so by the age of twelve He had reached a full understanding of who He was. He realized at the age of twelve that He had to be about His Father's business and He was talking about God.

According to Hebrews 5:8, He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. According to Hebrews 4:15, He “was in all points”...that is through all the points of life, all the chronological points of life...“tempted as we are, yet without sin.” As a child, He suffered the temptations that come to children living in a fallen world. The temptations that are categorically summed up in the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life came at Him in the way that such temptations come to children, and then older children, and then adolescence, and then teenagers, then young men, then adult men. He grew into all those points and experienced the temptations that are common to each of those ages and connected to these maturing features of life. The difference between Jesus and others was not that He had some kind of abnormal development. The difference was not that He was void of temptation. The difference was that He faced, like everyone, every temptation. He was tempted in all points like as we are so that He could be touched with the feelings of our weaknesses. The difference was He never sinned, He never sinned. Which, frankly, would make Him a pain to His siblings.

He was like no one who ever lived. He never had a bad attitude. He never disobeyed His parents. He never complained about dinner. He never bickered with His brothers and sisters. He never lied. He never entertained an evil thought. He never said an evil word. He never gossiped about a friend. He never slandered an enemy. And here’s one, He never wasted a moment of His life.

In every situation, through every form of temptation at every level of development, His entire life He was absolutely sinless. He always triumphed over every temptation of every kind. And He learned experientially through the battles with temptation to be obedient to His heavenly Father in everything all the time--absolute, holy perfection.

Now I will tell you, as a parent, He would be the favorite kid. That is not a stretch. I mean, that is zero-maintenance parenting. He must have been the envy of His siblings. He must have been the point of jealousy. His parents could do nothing but heap on Him love, never disciplined, never reprimanded. And I think from a human viewpoint, that’s why His brothers and sisters rejected Him, and they did. Even His lifelong perfection, thirty years in the house, didn’t persuade them of His Messiahship. According to John chapter 7 and verse 5, His siblings did not believe in Him. They did not believe in Him. They envied Him. They resented Him.

The only actual picture we have of Him is at the age of twelve in Luke 2. He went with His parents to the temple as they did every year. Mary and Joseph went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, taking Jesus and the entire family along. That was the pilgrimage with a large caravan of pilgrims from Galilee that was made every year. A four-day journey, by the way, the southeast, going around Samaria, and finally down to Jericho and up the backside of Jerusalem to the great city on the hill for the Passover celebration. When the celebration was over--and it was extensive, over many days--Joseph and Mary joined the caravan and began the return trip to Nazareth--back down to Jericho,

back around Samaria, and back to Galilee, and then to the west side of Galilee to the town of Nazareth.

Never having had in their entire life any reason to question Jesus' reliability, or responsibility, or fulfillment of every expected duty, they simply assumed that He was somewhere in the caravan-- probably walking ahead of them with friends and relatives. He was not a child you worried about. He was not the child you had to go find. He was not the child who got distracted. So it wasn't until the end of the first day's journey that they realized He's not there. He's been left behind in Jerusalem. And Luke reports this in Luke 2, "When they didn't find Him, they returned to Jerusalem seeking Him." Now so it was that after three days they found Him in the temple. It took them three days to find Him, and He's sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions, which was very respectful. He wasn't teaching them; He was asking them questions and listening to their answers. "And all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers."

No doubt they questioned Him and appropriately He gave them profound answers. So when His parents saw Him, they were amazed and His mother said to Him, "Son, why have You done this to us?" That's the first time in the twelve years of His life that He did something that confounded His parents because it appeared to be irresponsible and even disobedient. "Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously." That's the first time that He was ever any kind of a source of anxiety for His parents.

"He said to them, 'Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?' But they didn't understand the statement which He spoke to them." By the age of twelve, He has grown and developed into a full understanding of who He is and why He's here. Twelve years of age and He fully grasps exactly who He is, His nature, and why He has come. And His answer to His parents is not intended to disrespect them at all, it's rather a profound declaration that He knew who He was and He knew His mission. And He's in the temple and He calls it the house of My Father. And with those words He identifies Himself as the Son of God. This is a shocking claim that the Jews saw as blasphemy, according to John 5:18. But His parents knew it was the truth. They knew because before His birth they had been visited by an angel and told that the child would be the Son of God. They knew.

Amazingly after that incident, at the age of twelve, after that monumental declaration, Jesus returned submissively with Joseph and Mary and lived at home for eighteen more years, eighteen more years. And according to Luke 2:51, He continued to be subjected to His parents. And in the eyes of His family and His siblings, brothers and sisters and friends and relatives and neighbors, He resumed regular life. The normalcy of His childhood and early adulthood is confirmed by the fact that when He began His public ministry, His former neighbors in Nazareth did not believe that He was the Messiah, did not believe that He was the Son of God. That's how normal His childhood was. In fact, in Matthew 13 they said, "Is this not the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary and His brothers, James,

Joses, Simon and Jude? And His sisters, are they not all with us? Where then did this man get these things?” Why is He making these outrageous claims? That’s coming from the people who watched Him grow up. They assumed that He was like any other child, even if more righteous, but refused to believe that He was the Son of God, the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world.

With Jesus’ brothers, it was even a deeper rejection. They were so set in their unbelief that as they watched His ministry begin. You see this in the third chapter of Mark, as they watch His ministry begin. They conclude with this outrageous claim, Mark 3:21, “He is out of His mind. He’s making claims that are claims of a maniac, some kind of mental patient.” Their unbelief is inexcusable, on the one hand. And because they were around Him all the time and exposed to His absolute perfection, their unbelief is hostile, much of it probably born out of envy and jealousy. And I guess is the purest illustration of Mark 6:4, “A prophet is not without honor except in His own country, among His own relatives, and in His own house.” That’s what he said. They were skeptic because they were envious.

He hadn’t performed any miracles for them growing up. He hadn’t raised any dead playmates. He hadn’t created birds. John 2:11 says that when He turned water into wine it was the beginning of the signs that He did. His childhood was normal from the standpoint of absent miracles and supernatural works. But His perfection was obvious to all. He lived a life that was in dramatic contrast to James, Joses, Simon, Jude, and the girls. But it didn’t convict their hearts, and it didn’t convince them of His true identity because, as we all know, familiarity breeds--What?--contempt, and perfection generates rejection. And in their minds they had scorn and disdain for Him so that they designated Him as a man who was out of His mind, to make the claims that He made when He began His ministry.

I understand the human side of having an older brother who is perfect--an older brother who literally is the background against which you see in bold relief your own sinful deficiencies, and they’re all exaggerated by comparison to Him. And I don’t know how many times Joseph and Mary said this, but they must have said it more than they ought to, “Why can’t you be like your brother?” Which doesn’t really help either. Seeds of resentment, seeds of envy are planted in their hearts and among them is this man James who then becomes a very unlikely candidate for great usefulness to God.

James is mentioned first in the list of the four brothers, which suggests that he was the oldest of the four brothers, Christ being the firstborn. Most would say a year or two younger than Jesus. He’s the second born. So he feels the differences between himself and Jesus most powerfully because he’s been around the longest and because he suffers from the comparison most.

When Jesus left Nazareth and began His public ministry at the age of thirty, James would have become the leader of the family. Why do I say that? Because Joseph is dead by then. How do you know Joseph is dead? Because we don’t find him anywhere in the biblical narrative at all. He disappears apparently very early and by the time Jesus gets to the cross and Mary is standing at the foot of the cross, Jesus from the cross commits Mary into the care of John because she’s a widow.

James then, at some point, once Jesus leaves becomes the leader of the family. Up until that point, if Joseph had died at any time before Christ began His public ministry, Jesus would have not only been the older brother but the family leader and would have led that family from the standpoint of His perfection. And the fallout for all of that was a resentment toward Him.

James would have become the spokesman for the brothers and the sisters and likely the one most active in voicing an attitude of criticism and unbelief, as we read about in John 7. And so we meet James as an unbelieving brother who is hostile to the Lord Jesus. But let's turn the corner and look at him as a believing brother.

No indication is given, by the way, in any of the four gospels that Jesus' brothers came to believe in Him during His ministry--no indication, the three years of His public ministry. The indication is, in fact the statement of Scripture is, that it was after His death and after His resurrection and after His ascension that a dramatic and miraculous change takes place among His siblings, because His brothers appear among the believers, the 120 believers in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit. According to Acts 1:14, after Jesus ascended into heaven, the apostles, quote, "continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers," James, Simon, Joses and Jude. So they are on the Day of Pentecost, believers gathered with the other believers for the coming of the Holy Spirit. And the sisters may be included in the general reference to the women. No longer antagonistic, they had come to believe in Him as Messiah and Lord.

How did that happen? What was the event that turned them from being skeptical and envious and jealous and critical, to being believers? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Corinthians 15. You know that wonderful portion of Scripture, you can look at it and look at verses 3 through 7, I'll read that to you. Paul is surveying the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and this is what he writes, "I delivered to you first of all that which I also received...that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;...that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that He was seen by Cephas"...or Peter..."then by the twelve: after that, He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that, He was seen by James: then by all the apostles." Not James the apostle, but James His brother. This passage explains that Jesus' post-resurrection, after His resurrection, personally appeared to James and very possibly the other brothers were there also. It is a stunning reunion, a stunning reunion.

His brothers are not part of the scene around His death. They aren't there to defend Him. They aren't there to stand by Him. They aren't gathered around Mary as she stands alone as a widow at the foot of the cross. They're not anywhere. They're not anywhere. They don't find their way among the apostles in the Upper Room. They're nowhere to be seen, which indicates to us that they were still in unbelief. But undoubtedly in that moment of which Paul speaks when He appeared to James, that

stunning reunion became the moment of James' conversion, when He saw the risen Christ, his brother, Jesus. And that explains why he and the other brothers are gathered in the Upper Room and the sisters as well. James, the stubborn, skeptical, second-born son of Mary, comes all the way to saving faith, puts his trust in his older half-brother, the Lord Jesus Christ, through a post-resurrection appearance. And then is there with the rest of the family in the Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost.

That would have been enough for James to have been in a glorious story, but the story doesn't end there. It wasn't very long until James rose to a strategic leadership role in the church. He became the author of the book that bears his name, the epistle of James, and another brother, Jude, became the author of the epistle that bears his name, the epistle of Jude. Two of the four brothers would write New Testament epistles under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The New Testament doesn't reveal much about the personal life of James. He, as I said, is the second-born son of Mary and Joseph. He was from Nazareth, of course. He was trained as a carpenter, as all men were. They followed their fathers' trade. He was a Galilean, which would mean that he spoke not only Aramaic but also Greek, because it was up on the edge, and there was a trade route that ran that way, and speaking Greek was important if you wanted to do business beyond your own neighborhood. And that we know--we know his Greek was excellent because his Greek is excellent in the epistle that he wrote.

First Corinthians 9:5 says he was married. He was married. That's about all we know about him from a sort of biographical perspective. Although he had known Jesus for 30 years, he didn't believe in Him. He didn't believe in Him until his brother, his half-brother, risen from the grave, graciously appeared to him and saved him sovereignly. But the Lord had a great plan for this man, James, this unbelieving, skeptical brother. So we see him as an unbelieving brother, and then we see him as a believing brother.

Thirdly, we see him as a pillar in the church, pillar in the church. After the inauguration of the church on the Day of Pentecost, when the church was born, the twelve apostles scattered to preach. You know the story of the book of Acts. First it's Peter and John, and then the rest of the apostles are scattering and preaching. What about the church? Who's taking care of the church? Well, it fell to James; it fell to James to become the preeminent leader of the church in Jerusalem. He became, if you want to borrow a contemporary term, the lead pastor of the church in Jerusalem. The apostles traveled and carried the gospel to Judea, Samaria, and beyond to the uttermost parts of the earth, and James stayed home. A couple of New Testament passages allude to the vital position that James occupied in the church. For example, three years after Paul's conversion--maybe about five years after Pentecost--Paul went secretly to Jerusalem to meet with the leaders of the church. And according to Galatians 1:18 and 19, he met with James, the Lord's brother. So when Paul wanted to tell the church that he had been converted, which frightened some of them because they had known him as a persecutor, right? He went right to the leader of the church, James. Several years later,

when Peter was miraculously released from prison, Peter instructed the believers who had prayed for him. Remember that in Acts 12? “Go tell these things to James. Go tell James.”

James had become the focal point of church leadership in Jerusalem and the significant church-related matters were to go to him and through him. His leadership reaches kind of its high point in what is known as the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15. We don't have time to go into all of that. But what had developed is this, and this we would understand. It doesn't take long before error starts to attack the true gospel. And there's a major theological controversy in the early church revolving around the gospel. It was A.D. 49; Paul comes back from his first missionary journey, along with Barnabas, and they come into a conflict with some false teachers who insisted this: that Christ is true, we believe in Christ, but believing in Christ is not enough to be saved. You have to also be circumcised, and you have to practice certain aspects of Judaism to be saved. So they come up with a combination of grace through faith in Christ, and works through ceremonies.

Acts 15:1 puts it this way: “Certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, ‘Unless you're circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’” These false teachers have been known in church history as Judaizers because they wanted to impose external aspects of Judaism, combining the works of the Mosaic law with the grace of the gospel, and thus confound and convolute the gospel and destroy grace. They were attempting to destroy grace. If you mix works into grace, Paul says in Romans, grace is no more grace.

So here they are in that first century, the middle of the first century, having to deal with a heresy that threatens the very heart of the gospel of salvation. So a council is called in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas travel to Jerusalem to meet with the twelve apostles, the church leaders, and James is the moderator. James, in this setting, is called in Galatians 2:9, “One of the pillars of the church.” One of the pillars of the church. Who were the other pillars? Peter and John, Peter and John.

Acts 15 details the role that James plays. And you can study it for yourself. He directs the council. After Paul and Barnabas talk about the gospel, salvation has been granted to the Gentiles, the gospel of grace was preached to them, these hostile Jewish legalists come in behind the preaching of the gospel and they start dumping these demands for conformity to ceremonies on these converts. And they say, according to verse 5 of Acts 15, “It's necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.” And so the apostles and elders, under the leadership of James, come together to consider this matter. This is the first church council to affirm sound doctrine.

Listen to verses 7 through 11. The conclusion of the council is that whether Jew or Gentile, all are saved through faith alone by grace alone. And here's the testimony that Peter gives at the council. “Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth”...Peter's saying...“the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made

no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.”

It was clear that faith was enough because they received the Holy Spirit, Peter said, and he saw the phenomenon. “Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.” Sinners are forgiven and saved and reconciled to God by grace through faith alone, not by any observance of Mosaic ceremonies or rituals or laws.

When Peter finished speaking on that council, James gave a response. But the full weight of authority as the leader of the Jerusalem church and the one presiding over the council, James’ word echoed that of Peter, rejoicing that the Lord had visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. God was saving Gentiles without any regard to the ceremony of circumcision or the law of Moses. The clear verdict of the council was that salvation doesn’t require adherence to the Mosaic law--it is by grace through faith.

So here, in this early stage of the church, as the gospel is captured and affirmed--the gospel of divine grace that has come under attack--at the very center of the defense of this is James, the brother of our Lord Jesus. His prominence in the Jerusalem church is highlighted one last time in Acts 21. Almost a decade after the Jerusalem Council, Paul returns to Jerusalem where now--57, 58 A.D.--this time he is to be arrested and imprisoned, Paul is, and be sent to Rome for trial. When Paul first comes into Jerusalem, we read this: “James and all the elders of the Jerusalem Church gathered.” Paul came to report to them what God again was doing among the Gentiles. Ten years later, after the council, James is still the leader of the church. James is not mentioned again in the book of Acts.

According to church tradition, five years after that visit of Paul, around 62 A.D., he was martyred. When the Roman governor, the Roman procurator Porcius Festus, died, there was a gap, a brief time before the next Roman governor was assigned and installed in Judea. And in that transition period without a governor, the Jewish high priest began to exercise his hostile powers against Christianity. He took advantage of the lack of imperial oversight and had James arrested under the authority of the Sanhedrin. He was accused of breaking the law, the law of Moses; he was convicted; he was sentenced to die. And history tells us he was thrown off the edge of the temple and then stoned and then beaten to death by an angry mob. And that’s the end of the life of James.

Looking back over his life, it is difficult to overstate the strategic importance that this man had. He led the infant church during the critical time: the church newly born, emerging out of Judaism, many Jewish Christians not understanding how the law of Moses, which was so important in the past, connected with grace and faith. Still hanging on to festivals, ceremonies and activities familiar to them, he was the instrument that God used to lead the church in shifting toward freedom and letting go of those things of the past.

Believers were starting to take the gospel to the Gentile world. Gentiles were believing and being saved and didn't need to be offended by over-scrupulous Jews who were imposing legalism on them. He was the leader in all this time of transition. James' ministry was critical in setting the foundation for the church. James was the first model pastor. We don't think of that often, but James was the first model pastor of the first church. And he fought for doctrinal purity. As I said, unlike the twelve apostles who eventually left Jerusalem to take the gospel through the world, James never left. He stayed with the church he loved, and he led that church faithfully for thirty years until the day he was killed.

His commitment was to his flock, to care for them. His commitment was to the truth. His commitment was compassion for the consciences of his fellow Jews who were still sensitive to the traditions of Judaism. He had a shepherd's heart. And his shepherd's heart comes out in the five chapters of his epistle.

Now that you know a little more about him, read it and hear it coming from the heart of this man. And so, he was an unbelieving brother, and then a believing brother, and then a church pillar. Fourthly, a writer of Scripture, a writer of Scripture.

There are several men named James in the New Testament, but he is the author. The first possibility, James the son of Zebedee and brother of John, couldn't be the writer of the epistle because he was killed by Herod Agrippa before the epistle was ever written. The only possible writer is James, the brother of our Lord, the shepherd and pastor of the Jerusalem church. He wrote this epistle to Jewish believers who had fled from Jerusalem under the persecution instigated by Herod around the year 44. The letter doesn't mention the events of Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council, which suggests that it was written before those occurred. James likely penned it, then, in the early forties, which makes it the first New Testament book written, with Galatians the second one. So he's the first instrument that God uses to write a book that's in the New Testament.

If you were to study the book of James, just to summarize, you would note five character traits about him. First, he was a man of true humility. How do we know he was a man of true humility? Because he begins his book this way, "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ" (James 1:1). "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ."

If you wanted to gain a little impact, use a little leverage, he might have said, "James, the brother of the Lord Jesus." He made no mention--he makes no mention anywhere of his family relationship. He makes no mention in the book of his prominent position as the leader of the church. He simply sees himself as a slave of God and a slave of his older brother. James was a humble man. His only honor was to be a slave of the one that he scorned for thirty-plus years.

Secondly, he was a righteous man. He is known in church history as James the Just, or James the Righteous. And when you read the five chapters of the book of James, you will find at least fifty imperatives, fifty commands, as he commands his readers to live a life of righteousness, a life of virtue, a life of obedience. And he even warns his readers not to fall into sin-loaded traps. James the Righteous--he became known that way.

Thirdly, he was a loving pastor. In his letter we see a man of compassion and a man of sympathy as his heart pours out toward the destitute, alienated, struggling, literally strangers who have fled the persecution and are now living in alien places, poor and destitute. He sympathizes with them. In his letter we see his love exhibited in the fact that he has no tolerance for favoritism in the church-- doesn't want to see anybody give special attention to the rich man. He encourages unity within the body of Christ. He writes the church is a fellowship of the rich and the poor. He is bent on his people knowing heavenly wisdom and not earthly wisdom. He wants his people to humbly love one another and he refers to them as beloved. He is a humble, righteous, and loving man.

Fourthly, he's a man of the Word and prayer. His mastery of Scripture is seen in the fact that his short letter contains four direct quotes from the Old Testament--four direct quotes and forty indirect references to the Old Testament. He's a man of the Word, a man of the Word. Includes a number of parallels, by the way, to the Sermon on the Mount, echoing the teaching of Jesus. He's also a man of prayer and that's how he ends his letter with that great section on prayer--"the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).

And finally, James was a theologian clearly, because in that little book of five chapters you have a theology of suffering, a theology of sin, a theology of temptation, a theology of fallenness, a theology of the demonic world, a theology of the law, a theology of faith, a theology of the church, a theology of God, and a theology of Christ--all in those five chapters. He presents Christ as the source of wisdom, the One before whom all men and women are humbled. He presents Christ as the One who controls all history and human destiny, as the coming King, the Great Physician. He emphasizes that God is one God, the Creator of the world, the source of righteousness, the object of worship, the guide and true wisdom, the Sovereign Ruler, the enemy of sin and worldliness, the leader of heaven's host, the Judge of all, and the gracious Redeemer of those who repent.

There's a rich theology of God and theology of Christ there. And though it's only five chapters long, it abounds with profound truth and personal application. Its tone is both theological and practical, personal and pastoral.

So, in wrapping up--really immense impact from his life, but what an unlikely hero he is. You might have expected the half-brother of Jesus to be an influential leader in the church just because he grew up in the most privileged family. But in James' case, his familiarity with Jesus was the greatest

obstacle to his salvation. Like his neighbors in Nazareth, James was filled with incredulity and contempt for his older brother when He claimed to be the Messiah. His skepticism was not due to any imperfection in Jesus, but his own jealousy. But the Lord had plans for James. In a marvelous act of divine grace, after the resurrection, Jesus appeared to James in profound mercy, dispelled his doubts and derision, and radically saved him. And when he appears in the history of the church in the book of Acts, he is a man with no contempt, but rather a man who is willingly the slave of his older brother, who worships Jesus as his Lord and Savior. And his loyalty to Jesus is so strong that he willingly gave his life as a martyr for his older brother.

God used him in amazing ways. And, you know, the Lord is in the business of doing that with the most unlikely people, including us, including you. And the story will never be fully understood until it's complete. Be available--who knows what God has planned for your life?

Father, we thank You tonight for the opportunity that You have given to us to take a glimpse of a man who on the surface looked useless, an obstacle, and yet in Your amazing grace You made him a man of immense influence, changed the course of history, was given the responsibility to be the first pastor ever of the first church. Lord, we thank You that You can still do what You did with James with us. We've seen it in many people. You're in the business of doing marvelous and eternal things with very unlikely people--sinful, weak, frail--because that's the only kind of people there are. And in Your sovereign mercy you lift them up and use them mightily. Thank You for that. We desire to be so used to Your glory, in Christ's name. Amen.

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