

Sermon Transcript

Introduction to James
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I remember going out to eat with her one time, and I remember we were just kind of talking, you know. And if you've ever been a Christian trying to date, at least a pastor, one of the things you do is you throw in a little Scripture there, right? To see if she kind of gets excited about that, right? And so I started to quote from the book of James a little bit: "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance." (James 1:2–3)

I'm not kidding you, she jumps in. She's memorized the first chapter of James and starts doing it. Man, I'll tell you what, when you're a Christian guy, a single guy—that's hot. I was like, "Whew, hello Mama!"

That was so important to me because the book of James has been a big part of my life. When we named our son, we named him Cooper James Largent. I've got an uncle whose name is James, and I think he thinks we named him after him, but we didn't. We named him after the book of James because James has been an important part of my life.

And so, my pattern is usually to jump—not jump between books—but to jump between the Old Testament and the New Testament. So we did Nehemiah, then Romans, then some stuff in Exodus. Now, we're jumping back into the New Testament to the book of James.

Now James is... if you look at the epistles, the epistles of Paul, they tend to focus—because we did Romans—they tend to focus on details about salvation. How do you become a Christian? Recognizing I am a sinner. There needs to be a sacrifice. So when we did Romans, it was very detailed: this is how you become a Christian.

The Roman Road, right? Verses that lead you to the Gospel through specific verses of Romans: "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) And it just kind of goes through that. The epistles tend to be—at least Paul's—very, very specific as to how the Gospel is: the resurrection, the death of Christ, the suffering, the curse He took upon Himself.

When you get to James, it's a different story. James never once mentions the resurrection of Jesus. He never once mentions the death of Jesus. All the details like that are gone because he's not interested in trying to lead a group of people to Christ. He's interested in the church in Jerusalem and trying to see if they're really saved or not. He's more interested in verifying that you're a Christian. It's for believers. It's for Jewish people who had supposedly

converted and were a part of this church in Jerusalem. It's about testing your faith, verifying whether you're a Christian or not.

It's very Sermon on the Mount-like. Here's what I mean by that: Jesus, on the Sermon on the Mount, had all kinds of people there who were very religious, right? All these religious people show up. A lot of them were religious. And Jesus starts saying stuff to them—not to share the Gospel with them—but to test whether they really have a relationship with God or not, whether they really are changed people or not.

He's testing them. So the Sermon on the Mount's a big test. He goes up to them and says, "You guys think you're really holy and right with God because you've never committed adultery. Really? Have you ever looked at a woman lustfully?"

"Well, yeah, of course, we've done that."

"Then you failed the test. You failed the test of righteousness because you've looked at a woman lustfully; you have committed adultery with her in your heart."

"Well, at least we never killed nobody."

"Really? You never killed nobody? I'm looking at your police record—yep, didn't kill nobody. But did you—have you ever hated anybody in your heart?"

"Well, yeah, we've hated people in our heart, but we never actually committed murder."

"Well, see, you failed the test. You failed the test because your heart is a certain way. Your heart's not right."

You think you're good because you love your friends. This is the Sermon on the Mount: you love your friends; you're good to your friends. But you're a jerk to your enemies, and you treat them bad.

Well, what? You failed the test. You failed the test.

Because the test is, everybody likes their friends. It's hard to start loving your enemies, right? That's the sign. That's the test. It's all about testing people.

So, Jesus is testing the faith of people to show them that they aren't really righteous, that they aren't saved, that they need salvation.

And so, the question this morning is: are you saved this morning? And a lot of you go, "Yep, I'm saved." How do you know?

How do you know, like, for sure? How do you know, not just, "Oh, well, I got a pretty good feeling about it, feeling good." How do you know, right? "Well, because I prayed a prayer. I remember, I was in camp. I prayed a prayer this one time." Lots of people have prayed that prayer that aren't saved. A lot of people have prayed the sinner's prayer that aren't saved. And how do I know that? Because we apply a test.

You say, "Well, you can't do that. You'd be judging me." No—a test is applied.

The test is: what are you doing in your life? How does your life look? What are you doing? Is your heart changed? You see somebody that says, "Well, I prayed a prayer when I was really young," and you say, "Yeah, but your life's a nightmare. You don't obey God in anything."

How can you say you're saved when there's been absolutely no change in your life at all?

I used to actually think this: I didn't go to church when I was young. I wasn't a Christian. So when I became a Christian, everybody was talking about, "You get saved and you have assurance." I thought somehow God sent down this supernatural thing called assurance and just made you super positive that you were saved, and that it was some kind of supernatural external thing. And you do get the Holy Spirit—but the Holy Spirit doesn't just give you assurance magically.

What the Holy Spirit does is the Holy Spirit tests you. It provides tests, right? We receive the Holy Spirit, but the way the Holy Spirit verifies in you that you are saved is that change comes in your life because of the Holy Spirit. All of a sudden, I feel guilty for stuff I didn't feel guilty for before. All of a sudden, I'm prompted to act in ways I didn't act before. That's evidence—that's verifying that I'm a Christian, right?

The Sermon on the Mount and the book of James show us that we know we are saved by our faith being proven by works, by the things that we do in our life. That's going to be the main theme of this study.

So, the book of James is basically going to be a series of tests. It's going to be a series of tests to see if your faith is genuine or fake.

And you might say, "Man, I don't want to come back for that. I might find out my faith isn't real!" No—you want to. You want to know that it's real, that it's genuine. You want to run through the tests. You want to see.

So, we're going to talk about James. Here's what we need to do first: there are four dudes in the Bible named James. You're like, "Which one of them wrote the book?" Right? Who's the James that wrote it? So we're going to take a look at this and try to find out which guy it is.

Let's open first to James, chapter 1, verse 1. This is the only verse we're going to do this morning. We'll dive in heavy next week.

It says: "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings." (James 1:1)

Now, this name James—it's Iakobos in Greek. That word is actually Jacob. James and Jacob are the exact same thing. When you translate Jacob from Latin into English, it becomes James. But there's more than one James here. And so we're going to throw up something here in a little bit and give you the possibilities of who it could be based on the Bible. First, there's a guy by the name of James, the son of Alphaeus.

He's one of the twelve disciples, so he would be a good candidate, right? He walked with Jesus. He may know a couple things about Jesus.

But we don't really know anything about him.

The only time we ever see him in the Bible is when he's in the list of all the disciples. He never jumps up and does anything really important. We don't see anything. There's more than one James too. In Mark 2:14, it says: "As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. 'Follow me,' Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him." (Mark 2:14)

You go, "Well, that's about Levi. That's not about James." Yeah, but they got the same last name, don't they? The same daddy.

So, James the disciple is the brother—because they share the same dad—of the tax collector Matthew. Okay, so that gives you a little bit of an idea who one of the Jameses is—and he's a disciple of Jesus. So Matthew and his brother James were both disciples of Jesus.

There's another James we can take a look at: James, the father of Judas. You're like, "Well, that sounds ominous."

Luke 6:13–16 says: "When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles: Simon (whom he named Peter), his brother Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon who was called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot, who became a traitor." (Luke 6:13–16)

So, there are two Judases: one is Judas Iscariot. The other Judas is designated by the fact that his dad's name is James. Now, there's nothing in the Bible to think that either of these two wrote the book. So now we get into the most famous James that you probably know—the most famous James. That'd be a good restaurant name: "Famous James."

James the son of Zebedee.

You remember the Sons of Thunder, right? James and John. Their mama comes and tries to help them out, trying to say, "You should give them distinguished spots in your kingdom," and all that kind of stuff. They're kind of big-time in the Bible. They're among the twelve disciples. Peter, James, and John were in the inner circle. This James was at the Transfiguration when Jesus showed all his glory on the mountain.

You're like, "That's got to be the guy, right? I mean, that guy's tight with Jesus!" But...

Let's look at Scripture here.

Acts 12:1–3 says: "It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death

with the sword. When he saw that this met with approval among the Jews, he proceeded to seize Peter also." (Acts 12:1–3) Because we know that the book of James was written around 45–50 A.D., and James was dead by 44 A.D., he couldn't have written the book of James.

So, who's left? There's one James left. You're like, "I didn't even know there was another James!" A lot of you probably thought it was only those Jameses—the apostle James. No, no, no. I'm going to tell you who James is—the one who wrote this book—so that we can clearly understand where this is coming from. James is the brother of Jesus.

Remember, Jesus had a bunch of brothers too. Jesus wasn't the only child of Mary. She was a virgin when she had Jesus, but she had children after that—sons and daughters. They would all be half-brothers and half-sisters because they had different fathers. Jesus had relatives. James was one of His brothers. Can you imagine sharing a room with Jesus as a kid? Imagine sitting next to Jesus every morning, going to school with Him. These brothers grew up with Jesus. James knew Him from the time he was born. Jesus was there when James was born.

Galatians 1:15–20 says: "But when God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus. Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother." (Galatians 1:15–19)

Paul is saying, "I didn't go consult with everybody. I didn't see any other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother."

James is called a pillar of the church in Jerusalem. He's a major figure.

Galatians 2:9 says: "James, Cephas, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me." (Galatians 2:9)

James is not just any old Christian; he's one of the leaders—the pillars. But it wasn't always that way. Because earlier in Jesus' ministry, His family thought He was crazy. Mark 3:21 says: "When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" (Mark 3:21) James would have been one of those brothers standing outside. They thought Jesus was out of His mind.

Skip down to Mark 3:31–35. It says: "Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.' 'Who are my mother and my

brothers?' he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.'" (Mark 3:31–35)

But that doesn't detract from the fact that His real, physical mother and brothers came to take Him away because they thought He was crazy.

John 7:2–5 says: "But when the Jewish Festival of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, 'Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world.' For even his own brothers did not believe in him." (John 7:2–5)

James did not believe in Jesus. He grew up with Him—but he didn't believe. But something happened after the resurrection.

After Jesus rose from the dead, He told the disciples to wait in the upper room for the gift of the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:12–14, it says: "Then the apostles returned to Jerusalem from the hill called the Mount of Olives, a Sabbath day's walk from the city. When they arrived, they went upstairs to the room where they were staying. Those present were Peter, John, James, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers." (Acts 1:12–14)

All of a sudden, after the resurrection, James is a believer. How did that happen?

1 Corinthians 15:3–7 says: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles." (1 Corinthians 15:3–7)

He appeared specifically to James. It's listed separately. Jesus sought out His brother after the resurrection. And after that, James is changed. He becomes a follower of Jesus. He becomes a pillar in the church. After getting saved, James becomes a prominent leader in the church in Jerusalem—the most prominent leader there. Acts 12 tells us Peter had just been sprung out of prison. When Peter gets out, he goes to the house where the believers are praying for him.

Acts 12:16–17 says: "But Peter kept on knocking, and when they opened the door and saw him, they were astonished. Peter motioned with his hand for them to be quiet and

described how the Lord had brought him out of prison. 'Tell James and the other brothers and sisters about this,' he said, and then he left for another place." (Acts 12:16–17)

Peter says, "Tell James." Why? Because James is now the leader of the church in Jerusalem. He's the senior pastor, the deacon, the bishop—he's the one in charge. You move into Acts 15, and you see it again. In Acts 15, there's a big council—the Jerusalem Council. Here's what's happening:

There was conflict between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Paul was saying that Gentile Christians don't need to be circumcised—that they just need to believe in Jesus. But the Jews in Jerusalem were saying, "No, they need to be circumcised like we were!"

Acts 15:12–15 says: "The whole assembly became silent as they listened to Barnabas and Paul telling about the signs and wonders God had done among the Gentiles through them. When they finished, James spoke up. 'Brothers,' he said, 'listen to me. Simon has described to us how God first intervened to choose a people for his name from the Gentiles. The words of the prophets are in agreement with this, as it is written...'" (Acts 15:12–15)

James is speaking on behalf of the council. He's speaking on behalf of the church in Jerusalem. James makes the ruling. He says, essentially, "No, they don't need to be circumcised. God already has their hearts." James is leading the early church. History tells us James was martyred in 62 A.D. Here's how it happened: The religious leaders wanted to get rid of him. They took him to the top of the temple—over 100 feet high—and pushed him off. But James survived the fall. So, they went down with clubs and beat him to death. And interestingly, the place where they threw James off is the same place where the devil took Jesus during the temptation and said, "Throw yourself down from here." It's the same exact spot. James' death was brutal—but he died a faithful follower of Jesus, a leader in the church, a martyr for the faith.

This brings us back to what we're going to be learning from James. The book of James is going to give us a series of tests. Tests that are meant to verify if your faith is real or fake. Throughout this book, we're going to be applying tests to ourselves. If your faith is genuine, I want you to be assured. I want you to look at the test and say, "Yes! I'm following Jesus. I am truly His." If not, I want to encourage you—talk to me, get into the Word, and let's make sure. Let's get your faith to where it's solid and you can pass the test.

That's why we're calling this series "Faith That Works."

Because:

- A faith that is tested is a faith that works.
- Non-genuine faith doesn't work.

- It has no benefit to you.

We want to discover a faith that works.

Closing Prayer:

God, thank You so much for Your Word. God, we're excited. I pray that You would get us into this book this week, that we would read this first chapter this week, and that You would begin to give us wisdom—even before we show up here again—through the power of Your Holy Spirit.

God, as You test us, I pray that we would be found to have genuine faith, and that we would have assurance in our salvation, assurance that You are working in and through us. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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