

The Artichoke

James Series

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Bible Text: James 1:1-2

Preached on: Wednesday, January 27, 2010

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Open your Bibles to James. Today we are going to begin a series in the book of James and we shall read the first 11 verses.

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings.

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that man ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways. But the brother of humble circumstances is to glory in his high position; and the rich man is to glory in his humiliation, because like flowering grass he will pass away. For the sun rises with a scorching wind and withers the grass; and its flower falls off and the beauty of its appearance is destroyed; so too the rich man in the midst of his pursuits will fade away.¹

Thus far the reading of God's Word.

You may be seated.

I don't know how many of you have ever eaten an artichoke. I am sure that I were older than most of you when I had my first artichoke.

Now artichokes are very interesting. They are a lot of work for a little sweetness. But they are worth it. But they are also a very unique little vegetable or fruit, whatever they are, because as you pull away the leaves they are not completely useless. The end of each leaf is connected to the heart and so here is about a quarter of an inch of succulence there

¹ James 1:1-11.

that you may suck off the leaf or dip it in some sauce and enjoy it. And that is a bit of foretaste of what waits for you when you finally get to the artichoke heart.

Now, artichokes and eating them are a bit like some portions of Scripture. They are a lot of work in them and on the surface they appear to be not that profitable. But as we approach such passages of Scripture we must keep in mind 2 Timothy, what Paul tells us there about all Scripture, that it is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

All Scripture, all that Paul had before him, that would have been the genealogies of Chronicles. All Scripture for us is all that is in the 66 books of our Bible.

Now the artichoke verses in the New Testament are the apostolic salutations. And we tend, when we come to them, to want to just jump over them. After all, it is pretty evident here. We have got a few statements of truth. But really what do they have to do with life and practice and doctrine?

Well, everything. This is the artichoke leaf. It is connected to the heart and, thus, it has profit and brings us to the heart. These salutations are connected to the heart of the message of the book. And they themselves are profitable for us and lay the foundation of what the book is about, learning something of its purpose through its writer and its recipients.

But under those leaves there is succulent truth that the Holy Spirit reveals to us in the salutation.

So as we begin this morning a new series in the epistle to James we are going to look at the first verse, the salutation. And through this we will learn something of the authority and purpose of the book, which, as you will see, is very important.

In the salutation we see that the Holy Spirit has inspired James to write a book for our encouragement and for the promotion of a lively faith. The Holy Spirit has inspired James to write a book for our encouragement and for the promotion of a lively faith.

We will consider two things as we look at verse one: the divine authority of the book of James and then divine purpose in the book of James.

We begin, then, with the divine authority revealed in these words, “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”²

Now, it is important that we know who James is. We recognize that when we approach the divine authority of a book, it is premised primarily on two things. The New Testament, that it was written under apostolic authority and that the Holy Spirit bears witness through its words to us of its divinity. We will see that second as we work our

² James 1:1.

way through the book of James. But this morning we want to see the first in this very simple salutation, “James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”³

Well, who is James the author of this epistle?

Well, from the epistle we can assert certain things about him. He was a Jewish Christian. Most likely from the book he lived in Palestine. He wrote with apostolic authority and he was a man of preeminent dignity and usefulness in the Church.

When we set those qualifications before us, we go to the book of Acts. We see that there is one preeminent candidate as the author of this book and that is the James of the book of Acts who is the moderator of the Jerusalem church or session. There are a number of parallels between James in the book of Acts and our writer. James in the book of Acts was a man of eminent piety and usefulness. He is known as a godly man. According to tradition his nickname was James the Just. His knees were called camel knees because of the calluses in the time that he spent in prayer.

We know that by tradition that James in the book of Acts was martyred around 62, 63 AD.

Festus of Acts has died as... serving as the governor in Judea and Syria and before the replacement comes the Jews taking opportunity to persecute the Church. No protector there physically. And James is called on to recant. He refuses to do so. Supposedly, they cast him off the pinnacle of the temple and then stoned him and beat him with clubs.

And so this man of eminent piety obviously was well known in the life of the Church.

There are also some linguistic parallels, particularly the one extended passage we have from James of Acts in Acts chapter 15. There are a number of parallels with style and vocabulary there in that which we find in the book of James. For example, the greeting. It is a very simple greeting as we will see in a moment. “Greetings...” That is how James begins the letter in the book of Acts. The special exhortation, “Hearken, pay attention, muse,” in his letter and in his address to the Church. His use of soul in the place of person is found both in his speech and letter in the book of Acts and in his book. His description of conversion as turning to God is a description that is used both in his speech in Acts and in the book of James.

So there are these parallels.

So we see that the James of the book of Acts is a Jewish Christian. He lives in Palestine. He is a man of eminent usefulness and fame in the Church.

But we know from Galatians chapter one verse 19 that he is also a man of apostolic authority. For there as the apostle is writing, showing his relationship to the Jewish

³ Ibid.

church and to the apostles, he speaks of his first visit and he says in chapter one verse 19, “But I did not...”⁴ Well, we will just read 18 as well.

Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord’s brother.⁵

And here James is at least given apostolic authority.

And we are told another thing about him at this point, that he is the brother—at least a relative—of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, that sets two candidates before us. There are three James in the New Testament. There is James the son of Zebedee, one of the premier apostles. But he was martyred in 44 AD and he was no kinship as far as we know to the Lord Jesus Christ. The other apostolic James, part of the 12, is James the son of [?] or Alphaeus. Those names seem to be interchangeable. He is also called James the Less. And it appears, when you look at the resurrection accounts and the crucifixion accounts, that his mother was a sister of Mary. And, thus, James the apostle, James of Alphaeus would have been a cousin of the Lord Jesus Christ and we know, particularly in Hebrew expression that brother can be put for cousin.

And so he meets two of the qualifications, or three. He is a Jewish Christian. He has apostolic authority and he is a relative of the Lord Jesus Christ.

But he is basically one of those unknown apostles. There is no imminent fame that is connected to him or usefulness. And it would see that if this were James the apostle mentioned in the book of Acts, that he would have been identified more carefully with the apostolic band.

That leaves, then, James the brother, the half brother—in my opinion it is to say the step brother—James the half brother of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For that distinct use of “James, the brother of the Lord,” seems to distinguish him much more than what in the eyes of the Church and the idea that he is called that already, you see, in the gospels, “James, the brother of the Lord,” or “the brethren of the Lord, James and Jude and Joseph.”

And so I take this to be James the brother of the Lord, although I don’t think it is of great importance because both men would have written under apostolic authority.

James’ authority would have come as Paul’s did, directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. And so Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians chapter 15 verse seven that in the resurrection appearances that he also appeared to James. James had been unconverted. At what point

⁴ Galatians 1:19.

⁵ Galatians 1:18-19.

he was converted... was he like Paul, converted by this sudden appearance of his brother who, in fact, is the God man? We don't know. But by that appearance we may assume for James exactly what we assumed for the apostle Paul and that is he received special apostolic authority which has to be the case in Jerusalem because he was recognized on par with the apostles and the acting moderator of the Jerusalem church.

And so we know who this man is more than likely, James the brother of the Lord who wrote here under apostolic authority. We know by in the date of his death that he would have written sometime between 50 and 60 AD, or 61, 62. And I put it at 50 because he would have been writing at this point to Christians who had been set out by persecution as we will see in a moment into the Jewish dispersion.

But notice he tells us a bit more about himself and also about his authority when he further describes himself as the “bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶

The term “bond-servant” is that term that reminds us of one who has been purchased, but who willingly submits to the authority of a master in complete whole souled subjection.

James identified himself as a bond-servant of God. You know that when you have the title God used alongside one of the titles of one of the other members of the godhead it refers to God the Father in particular. So we say that he is a bond-servant of God the Father, reflecting on his election and his calling, that as a bond-servant of God he had been chosen by God the Father in eternity. He had been called by God the Father in the effectual call of the gospel.

Then he moves particularly to his office when he says he is also a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ. He sets Christ before us in the fullness of his work by his titles and names. He is Jesus, Jehovah saves, Emmanuel, God with us. He has come to save his people from their sins. He is the Christ. He is the anointed one of God who has been given the offices of prophet, priest and king for the accomplishment and application of your salvation.

But notice how these two titles are related to the first, he is Lord. And grammatically, Lord here is put on a par with God. It does not have the definite article, neither does the title God. So he is the servant of God and of Lord who, namely, is Jesus Christ. And we see by this conjunction that he ascribes to our Savior full deity.

As one commentator says, “Often when you find ‘Lord’ as a title of the Savior without the definite article, it is a description of his deity.”

Here God who is Lord Jesus Christ is equal with the Father, as we would say in our catechism, “The same in substance and in glory.” And he is the bond-servant of Christ because he now has been called by Christ to the unique office in the Church.

⁶ James 1:1.

It is not unusual for apostles to speak of themselves as the bondservants of Jesus Christ. Peter does so in 2 Peter chapter one. He says that he is the bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul, in Titus chapter one, actually uses the same designation. He does not call himself there an apostle. He is not having to defend his apostleship. That is why Paul so often uses that designation. But here he simply says, “Paul, a bondservant... of Jesus Christ.”⁷

What we have here is a reminder that these men were called as the Old Testament prophets were called to serve Christ, the head of the Church, in a very unique capacity, different from others. And so this James who had apostolic authority was the special steward of the mysteries of the gospel, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 4:1, that think of us “as servant and stewards of the mysteries of [the gospel].”⁸

So he is asserting, in this very simple manner, the authority by which he writes this book.

But notice in the mind of James and so many—all—the apostles, that beautiful element of humility that runs through there, the fact that he is very content simply to describe himself as the servant. I mean you think this guy has quite a résumé if I am right. He is the blood brother of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the apostle. He, in fact, has been recognized as one of the pillars of the Jerusalem church, the moderator of that church, significant in its actions.

But he is content to lay all that to the side, you see, because he reveals the fact that it is his privilege to be a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He also reminds us of how we each must relate to the Lord Jesus Christ. Blood relation does not put us in a saving relationship with God and blood relation doesn’t make the half brother of Jesus a Christian. Our covenant standing cannot make us born again Christians. It is a great privilege. Just as it was a great privilege for James to be reared in a home with Jesus Christ.

But that is not what saved him, is it? And seeing miracles didn’t save him. It was the sovereign grace of God and that is how he relayed it. He is the servant of God, a servant of Christ Jesus. And that is how you must think of yourself. Your worth is not found in how smart you are, your GPA, your future, your calling, your usefulness. Your worth is measured by how you relate to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you rest in him alone for your salvation, trusting in him for all hope, all life, for acceptance with God, trusting in him for your sanctification, as we will see as we work our way through this wonderful book?

[?] James who is the apostle writing with apostolic authority describes himself as such. It reminds us how we should think about ourselves as Christians. Every one of us, boys and girls, men and women, do you define yourself as a servant of God and of Christ Jesus?

⁷ Titus 1:1.

⁸ 1 Corinthians 4:1.

Do you recognize, this morning, that you have been bought with a price? You don't belong to yourself. You belong to God.

I trust you recognize the folly of having Jesus as Savior and not as Lord. If there were no other passage in Scripture, this clearly disabuses us of that notion. You are saved. You are a bond-servant of God. You belong to him, stock and barrel, heart, soul, strength. You are called upon to love him with the entirety of your being. Is this how you think of yourself? Do you define yourself in this way? And do you seek daily to define yourself in this manner? Would you give yourself anew to the service and to the will of the King? To say, "What e'er my God ordains is right. I submit to your holy calling and I submit to your tutelage and I submit to your law and I submit to your doctrine."

And, of course, most of you are preparing for the gospel ministry. And the apostle Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians chapter four verse five that bond-servants of God are the bond-servants of the people of God as well, fellow heirs and pilgrims and travelers.

"For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for [Christ's] sake."⁹

A minister is, in fact, like the apostle, a bond-servant of God, not with the same authority, but with the authority of office. But he has given us, as he gave them, to serve his people. That is how you must see yourself. Office is very important. Ordination is unique, setting aside to a unique task. But you must define that task, all you do as preacher and pastor, that you are here as a servant of God to serve the people of God, not to lord it over them, not to define some prestige in your authority or your office or your standing. [?] as a servant.

That doesn't take place magically when the presbytery lays on hands. You will never be a servant to a congregation until you have learned to serve your wives and children and your classmates and the people in the churches where you find yourself. Are you a servant?

In California in addition to teaching we had a church and we had lots of interns and I would just stand back sometimes and watch the ministerial interns. When something needed to be done which ones stayed in their clique, talking theology and which ones rolled up their sleeves and went to work.

You see, if you are called to be a minister of the gospel, you are called to be a servant to the people of God and that means when there are things to be done, you are right there in the mix helping to get them accomplished. You learn to serve now. Now is the time to develop this attitude of the ministerial servant.

So the Holy Spirit teaches us here in the first place of the bond authority of this book. That is important because the book has not always been accepted. There were some questions in the early church. But by 200 AD it was being quoted as Scripture. But that

⁹ 2 Corinthians 4:5.

was premised upon the Church really needing to ascertain not the Church deciding, but was this written by a man with apostolic authority? And, of course, the Spirit uniquely bears witness to it.

People like Luther didn't help the situation. He called it "a right strawy epistle." Later he would balance that out. He did say it was useful to be read in church, but he misunderstood James on faith and justification and, thus, he couldn't quite get all that worked out.

We glory that God has given us such a book by his authority. We receive it as such, not that we may sit over it, but under it as the Spirit of Christ teaches us through it.

That brings us, then, to the second point. What is the divine purpose in this book?

Well, we discover this in the second half of the salutation. "To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings."¹⁰

Now, you are wondering, "All right. I can see how you got authority out of the first half, but how do you get purpose here?"

Well, let's just look at what he says. The book is one of the general or catholic epistles, called that because it was a circular epistle. It was not designated to a specific geographical area, but written for the Church at large and, as such, it was written to Jewish Christians, defined in the first place as "the 12 tribes of the Dispersion,"¹¹ by now a technical term. Remember, it was used in John seven when Christ said, "Where I am going you can't come." He says, "You are going to go to the Dispersion."

That with the Assyrian, later Babylonian exile the 12 tribes were scattered, first throughout the Near East and eventually, then, under the Greeks and Romans, throughout what would have been called the Roman Empire. And their being scattered was a fulfillment of the veracity of God's Word, because he said that was what he was going to do to them if they disobeyed. Thus, it was a punishment. But as in all of God's acts it was for the good of his people. And it was through this punishment that we got the Greek translation of the Old Testament. It is through this punishment that there were synagogues now in most of the major cities of the world if not at least people gathering at the riverside for prayer.

So when the apostles went out and were told to go first to the Jews, they had a place to go. And there were Jews converted in the Dispersion throughout the world. There were links through the synagogues to the God fearers who had already come to believe in Jehovah and were waiting now for the final chapter that Jehovah has come in his Son to save his people from their sins.

¹⁰ James 1:1.

¹¹ Ibid.

But, particularly, when we think here of James' recipients, it is the Christians amongst that Dispersion, those who were there converted through the apostolic missionary enterprises.

But, remember, there has been at least probably two dispersions since the resurrection of the Savior and the ascension as we see the persecution in Acts chapter eight and Acts chapter 12. Again, the Church was scattered.

And that is a very important reminder to us that we are a pilgrim Church. We happen to live with a great deal of safety and prosperity. The people of God are pilgrim people. Our citizenship is in heaven. That is the primary location of our affection and our allegiance. And we are always going to be a pilgrim people until Christ comes again. And that... we are going to be a dispersed people and we are going to be often a persecuted people.

But we see that God cares. Just because God has dispersed us doesn't mean he has forgotten about us. And so God has raised up this man to write to his people who had been dispersed by persecution or by jobs, but now find themselves throughout the Roman Empire. James writes to them, the pilgrim people of God. He writes to you and me who know are God's Israel and are the pilgrim people of God.

And then he says to them, "Greetings."

I remember when I first learned Greek—long before many of you were born—1964, I loved the word *χαίρει* (kai'-ray), *χαίρει ἀνθρώποι*, *χαίρει γυναι*, (kai'-ray, an'thro pay, kai'-ray, goo'-nay) Greetings. And that is exactly the word that James uses. It seems like a pretty non descript term.

He adopts one of the forms of letter writers, the same as Paul adopts a more formal form in his salutation. This is more of the abbreviated and informal practice to say, "Greetings."

And, as I mentioned, he uses that in the letter he wrote on behalf of the Jerusalem church in Acts chapter 15. But we know from another catholic, general epistle that in the Church, this term has already taken on greater significance. And so in 2 John verses 10 and 11:

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds.¹²

Now, some people use this to say that when the Jehovah's Witnesses come to our door we should not invite them inside and have a conversation. I don't think that is at all what

¹² 2 John 10-11.

the Holy Spirit is talking about here. He is talking about the house of the Church. That is clear in the context of 2 John.

The greeting, then, is much more, "Would you want to come inside and talk?" The greeting is this apostolic greeting. It implies the holy kiss of communion and fellowship. It is a greeting of gospel ties. And so as James is writing to dispersed Jewish Christians he is saying to them, "I come to you in gospel ties."

Here in the simple word "Greeting," he is further laying the theological foundation for now the instruction that he has to give to them.

What, then, is that instruction?

Well, it is two things. In the first place, he writes to the persecuted and dispersed Church wonderful words of comfort and encouragement. God cares about his people. God now gives them this wonderful manual on encouragement.

But he also is writing to exhort them because their faith is growing cold. And that is often a danger. He wants to stir them up to a lively faith and piety.

So it is full of exhortation.

Over 50 times in 108 verses James uses the imperative. This could give some heartburn to some of our brothers today that don't want to see too much imperative in preaching. Fifty times, at least.

And so the book has been called the Proverbs of the New Testament. This is what this is. This is a wisdom book for the New Testament with this strong [?] link that some have related him to Amos. He quotes Amos in the Jerusalem council and there are themes and colors in Amos that we will see in this book as well.

So for these two reasons the Holy Spirit has inspired this book to comfort the Church and to exhort her to a more lively and dynamic faith. And that is what we are going to be about.

These are my reasons as we have seen the divine authority of the book, its divine purpose, the purpose must be my purpose and your purpose. We all suffer. And in the older you get the more you will learn about suffering and trial and tribulation. Even if we never are persecuted, the road to heaven is strewn with trial and difficulty, heart break and sorrow, rejection. And the Holy Spirit through this book will now prepare you. You need a back bone to live through the trials that God has set out for you.

And it is a very real possibility that we shall suffer even more publicly for our faith, beyond the minor disturbances that we experience now or our difficulties or our little inconveniences in our lives. There may be a time of great testing. God gives us books

like this, written to us, his pilgrim people, that we might, indeed, be equipped for such times.

So look for the encouragement here. We have stripped away the leaves of the artichoke. Get down to this heart and suck on it. Nourish yourself out of it.

But we also need the exhortation. I see cycles in our life as a community. I see our piety grow dim. I see it in us faculty members. I see it in you as students. That can never be acceptable to you and me. And so I bring us to this book that the Spirit of Christ might, indeed, renew our commitment to stir up within us this lively faith that demonstrates our relationship to the Lord God.

So lay your hearts bare before the searching exhortations of James. And may the Spirit of Christ truly make us more godly boys and girls and men and women.

But I add one more thing there. James doesn't talk a lot about Christ. But at the very foundation of the book in verse one he has clearly taught us by his relationship to God and the Lord Jesus Christ and by the apostolic greeting that all comfort comes to us only through Christ. And all grace to obey comes to us only by Christ. And so all of this about a lot of indicative in the book of James, it is premised upon the glorious indicative of our union with Christ, our being servant of Christ, our being joined together in the greeting of the brethren of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember that.

And so when you are convicted of sin, you must not stop and wallow in remorse. But take your broken heart to Christ both for pardon, but for the hope of power that you will grow and you will be changed.

And then I want to model for you, as we speak of this union with Christ, how you may and must preach duty to yourself, but to your people. Duty, serious searching of sin and exhortation, but always grounded in our beautiful Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our Father in heaven, we are your servants. You elected us and called us. We are the servants of Christ who has redeemed us and made us his own dear people. We are yours, heart, mind, soul and strength. We want to give ourselves to you anew in obedience. And we confess our need of you for all comfort and hope and strength, Lord. Grant these things to us. We thank you for your wisdom that gives us a book of divine wisdom and we look forward to our time in this book, what your Spirit will do for us individually and our families and in our community and our future ministries. So bless it to us in Christ's name we ask. Amen.