

## **James, the Brother of Jesus (part 3)**

### **Acts 15; James 5:13-20**

By Phillip G. Kayser

Intro:

This past week I watched two videos put out by Willow Creek Community Church. They were admissions that everything they have been marketing over the past decade has been wrong. I was actually pleasantly surprised. Their revelation (which they are also now marketing – which makes me a little bit cynical) is that a program driven church does not produce what they thought it would. I wish they had been convinced by Scripture rather than by statistics, but here is what happened. Pastor Hybels had authorized his executive pastor to do a comprehensive analysis of the *results* of their programs within their local congregation. He was pretty confident that this would be another key to marketing the Willow Creek model. But when the results of the study came in, he was devastated. He said it was the shake-up call of his life. Their vision had been that people needed to be put through a litany of programs in order to mature them in Christ. They spend millions of dollars every year on their own church's local programs. What they found was that their programs made people totally passive rather than turning them into self-feeders who matured.

Hybels said,

Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into, thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back it wasn't helping people that much. Other things that we didn't put that much money into and didn't put much staff against is stuff our people are crying out for... We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians - we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become 'self feeders.' We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their bible between service, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own.

Very interesting. Of course they found that they couldn't program that sort of thing because each person was unique. Well, not being satisfied with a study of their own congregation, they then did a study of 30 other churches that were Willow Creek wannabe churches and found exactly the same results. Their conclusion was that what was needed was individualized shepherding according to the needs of each individual. Novel concept. Too

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bad they didn't mention that it is 100's of years old. They call them spiritual training coaches. And I suspect their next marketing niche will be how to train individualized coaches. But I found it fascinating that they concluded that you couldn't put people through programs (except for maybe the first two levels of bringing them to faith) without negative results. Very interesting. The executive pastor, Greg Hawkins, said,

Our dream is that we fundamentally change the way we do church.

That we take out a clean sheet of paper and we rethink all of our old assumptions. Replace it with new insights.

Of course, being Willow Creek, they are marketing this discovery and encouraging people to join with them in this new training scheme. I hope they don't end up becoming another emerging church.

But as we finish off the life of James, the brother of Jesus today, I think you will agree that none of his success can be attributed to programs. We saw in our first sermon that he was not a polished man. His background argued against success. In fact, no one would have expected James to be one of the most influential people in Jerusalem – inside and outside the church. It wasn't his personality, upbringing or political savvy – he didn't have any. In fact, after reading some early church histories of James, he was a gruff guy who was not politically savvy at all. James was a man of the Word, not a man of the latest polls. He was passionate for God's glory, not for man's praise. He was empowered by the Holy Spirit, not by gimmicks.

I. James was a remarkable man

II. His humble beginnings

III. His earlier unbelief (Mark 3:21; John 7:3-5; Psalm 69:8)

IV. His Conversion (1 Cor. 15:7; Acts 1:14)

## V. His ministry and life in Christ

### A. His marriage and family life (1 Cor. 9:5; James 1:27; 2:11,15; 4:4)

We are going to look first of all at his family. Paul says that the family is *the primary* training ground from which church leadership is developed. Here's how 1 Timothy 3:4-5 words it: A bishop must be **one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)** That's 1 Timothy 3:4-5. This is an admonition that is ignored in our modern feminized churches. Statistics show that most churches in America do not believe this is a good requirement. Not to pick on Willow Creek, but they mandate feminism. They mandate that women be in every leadership position, and have had an incredible influence in pushing male leadership out of the church – not just in their local congregation, but

throughout the evangelical church. And just as a move on the chess board has consequences three or four moves later, any church that ignores the mandate for male leadership will eventually see a negative outcome. Most churches do not require elders to have children, and you can almost guarantee what their churches will begin to look like. The feminized Roman Catholic church has an emasculated clergy. Their ungodly doctrine of a celibate clergy is so deeply entrenched that they are blinded to the fact that none of the apostles was celibate; none of the early clergy was celibate. They claim opposite. According to Rome, James was unmarried and a virgin. But let's look at 1 Corinthians 9:5.

We aren't told a lot about his marriage. But if you look at 1 Corinthians 9:5 you can deduce a couple things. Paul is talking about various ways in which he has had self-denial for the sake of the Lord and His church. Let's start reading at verse 3.

**1Corinthians 9:3 ¶ My defense to those who examine me is this:**

**1Corinthians 9:4 Do we have no right to eat and drink?**

**1Corinthians 9:5 Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?**

**1Corinthians 9:6 Or *is it* only Barnabas and I *who* have no right to refrain from working?**

There are three questions that Paul asks with regard to self-denial that the others listed had not experienced to the extent that he and Barnabas had. The first relates to eating and drinking. Tradition says that James was an ascetic who refrained from sexual relations, from eating and drinking pleasant foods, wore scratchy clothing called sackcloth, abused his body so badly that it lost its feeling, and in many ways lived a very austere life. But the word "only" implies that none of the others had been as subject to the self-denial that Paul and Barnabas had experienced. But Paul and Barnabas had both been married, and even in their present single life, enjoyed food and drink and comfort on occasions. They knew how to abound and to suffer want. They were not ascetics. So we can conclude, neither was James.

The second question Paul asks was, "**Do we have no right to take along a believing wife, as do also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?**" We know from the Gospels that Peter was married, because Jesus healed His mother-in-law. You can't have a mother-in-law without a wife. But here Paul explicitly says that Peter was married. This is a great rebuke to the celibacy of the Roman Catholic clergy. Their supposed first pope was married. It appears that the other apostles were all married and had children. We know from other Scripture that Paul had married very young – likely at the age of 16, since he called himself a Pharisee of the

Pharisees and he was on the Sanhedrin. Pharisee's legalistically required marriage by age 18. But if you were really into Pharisaism, you got married at age 16. So many scholars believe that Paul, who was not only a Pharisee of the Pharisees, but also on the Sanhedrin, had to have been married very young with his children all grown up and his wife perhaps dead. So when Paul asks if he has no right to bring along a wife, he is asserting the right to be remarried. By God's guidance he chose not to.

Secondly, he is asserting that Jesus' brothers were married. The liberal, Joseph Ernest Renan, insists, "According to all tradition, James, the brother of the Lord, was not married."<sup>1</sup> Well, given these church father's views that marriage relations were sinful, I can see that. Some of these authors of course recognize that this clearly contradicts this passage in Scripture. One author said, "Of course, we have to bear in mind that Jesus' brother James, was not married, and his implied inclusion here ("the brothers of the Lord") would be an error." So they are implying that church tradition is not in error, but the Bible is. Very strange logic, especially since the traditions on James contradict each other repeatedly.

And there are other hints in the Bible that James cared for his wife. In James 1:27 James has a passion to support orphans and widows. This would impact how he treats his wife and children. It's interesting that Paul says that James took his wife with him on his long trips when he was able. He traveled with her. He took his husbandly responsibilities seriously and ministered to his wife. In James 2:15 he castigates those who fail to take care of the needs of a sister with clothing and food, so we can assume that he cared for those needs in his own family. The same book rails against adultery (2:11; 4:4) and that may be the reason why he didn't go on long trips without his wife. The main point is that James was a family man, not a hermit. His leadership grew out of that natural training environment. Every sin; every problem; every learning experience you need to have to develop leadership in country, church or culture can be learned in the family. It's the perfect environment for such training.

### **1. Application – We ought to care for our families (1 Tim. 5:8)**

There are three applications that I would like to make. First, we ought to care for our families. They are important. They are foundational for culture and church. Even a busy guy like James had a family integrated

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ernest Renan, *The History of the Origins of Christianity, Book V, the Gospels* (London, Mathieson & Co. nd), p. 282.

ministry. 1 Timothy 5:8 says, **But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.** The impulses that some have to neglect family for the sake of ministry is not a good impulse. You are only prepared for ministry as you minister to and with your family. And people say, “I’m too busy.” You could not have gotten more busy than James, yet the Scripture implies that he took care of her needs and spent time with her.

## 2. Application – RC church tradition is in error.

The second application is that you can’t trust Roman Catholic tradition. While there are some nuggets of truth scattered in that tradition, the Reformers pointed out that it is riddled with obvious contradictions and errors. Only the Bible is infallible.

## 3. Application: Don’t buy the RC doctrine of asceticism and celibacy.

Third, don’t buy the Roman Catholic doctrine of asceticism and celibacy. When you are enjoying a gorgeous steak and an ascetic spirit whispers in your ear that you should feel guilty, rebuke that demon in the name of the Lord. 1 Timothy 4 calls such guilt a doctrine of demons. Demons don’t want you enjoying life. Enjoying sin, yes, but not enjoying God’s good gifts. In contrast, God delights in delighting His people, and while He on occasion moves us to self-denial for a time and for a purpose (such as fasting, abstinence, exercise, giving away things), self-denial should not be confused with holiness. Otherwise the Pharisees were holy and Jesus was not. They exercised far more sacrifice from things than Jesus did. He drank more than they did, and they scurrilously called him a drunkard. He ate when they were fasting, and they falsely accused him of gluttony. But he did not allow those kill-joys to define His Christianity. I know it’s talking about the Sabbath, but in Nehemiah 8 God tells the people to quit mourning, and says, **Go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to those for whom nothing is prepared...** It’s God’s blessing. Ecclesiastes says, **Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works...** [In other words, you don’t have to earn God’s approval through self-denial. You celebrate out of a sense of His acceptance. He continues:] **Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life...**

I have spent more time on this subject because many books on James claim that he was an ascetic. If he was an ascetic, why would he pray for healing? Feeling miserable would be good, wouldn’t it? But James didn’t

see it that way. Why would he encourage Paul in Acts 21 to give church money to the poor? If poverty is next to godliness, let them be poor. Let them be hungry. Let them wear sackcloth. But that's not the way James thought.

**B. His role in leadership (12:17; 15:13-29; 21:18; Gal. 2:9; 1 Cor. 9:4-7)**

**1. He understood his leadership call, just as Paul did.**

Let's move on to leadership. Because previous sermons in Acts have already looked at the leadership of James, I will be more brief and only touch on one facet. There are many other facets of leadership from his life that are instructive, but we are only going to look at one. Turn to Galatians 2:9. James not only knew that he was called to be a church leader, but he understood the specifics of his call. Galatians 2:9 describes a meeting that Paul had with Peter, James and John in 46 AD. **And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.** James was called to the Jews, and his sense of call gave him a passion for the ministry which is what we will spend the bulk of this sermon looking at – his passions. 1 Corinthians 9 indicates that James was paid to do one thing, and to do it well. Just as Paul had a very specialized calling, James was called to serve in one thing – building up and ministering to the church in Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 10:13-16 Paul said, **We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us** [That's a very interesting phrase – “within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us.” Would you know the limits of the sphere that God has appointed to you? That's something that would help you to keep from getting burned out. It's something that would help you to say “No” when everybody and his uncle is asking you to be involved in their pet projects. Paul had a very specific calling. He knew what God wanted him to do. He goes on:] **—a sphere which especially includes you. ... to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.** Paul's sense of call was so specific that he said he operated within the sphere of that call. Well, James could have said the same thing. When everyone was fleeing Jerusalem because of the persecution under Saul and later under Herod, James stayed behind. He never left the city, even when Peter did. Why? Because part of James' call was to reach that city and to die in that city. He was burdened for that city.

Even when he was being stoned to death, he was crying out for that city. His sense of calling gave him boldness in the face of danger. It gave Him urgency. It gave him passion. It gave him perseverance. It gave him focus. It helped him to stand firm even when things weren't going well.

## **2. Application: It is wise to gain a heightened understanding of God's calling upon your life through**

And a similar sense of calling is a great aid in giving us a similar boldness, urgency, passion, energy and focus for our work. If you don't have a clear idea of what God's call upon your life is, I would encourage you to ask God to open your eyes and give you a passion for what He wants you to do. I've taken a number of people through this process. It involves the 5 C's. And if you don't know what those are, talk to me about it. During the remainder of this sermon I want to look at the passions of this great leader.

### **C. His passion for prayer (Acts 1:14; 2:42; 4:31; 12:5,17; James 5)**

The first mention of James in the book of Acts shows that he had already been given a passion for prayer. Acts 1:14 says about James and about a small group of other prayer warriors, **These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication.** The Greek word for "one accord" is kind of hard to translate into English. The Greek is *homothumadon*. It's a compound word that comes from *homos* (which means the same, or united) and *thumos* (which means heart, passions or inner spirit). There was an intensity in this united prayer meeting. But what is remarkable is that they maintained this for ten days (from ascension day to Pentecost). I don't know if you have ever been in long prayer meetings that go all day long, but that is tough. But from all the evidence that we have, it seems as if God gave James what we call *travailing prayer*. *Travailing prayer* is a periodic urge and burden to pray that cannot be escaped from. Until you spend time in prayer you don't have release in your inner spirit from this urge. You are driven to prayer until such time as you feel a release. And some of these people have a special gift for prayer that involves them in 4-8 hours of prayer a day. That is not normal. That really is a special gift. And it is a remarkable thing to witness. James was on his knees in prayer so long that an early historian (Hegesippus, who wrote in the 100's AD) said that his knees became thick and calloused like a camel's knees. Augustine said that his forehead developed calluses from being on the ground in prayer for so long. You can tell from my forehead that I don't measure up to James. I definitely don't have the gift of *travailing prayer*, although I have experienced it on occasion.

But I do count prayer to be one of the two most important parts of my ministry.

But let me quickly outline some hints of his prayer life. In Acts 2:42 it says that they all continued steadfastly in prayers. That would include James. James was part of the prayer meeting in chapter 4 where it says, **when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they spoke the word of God with boldness.** In Acts 12:5, when Peter was cast in prison, it says **constant prayer was offered to God for him by the church.** And as soon as Peter is released, he tells one prayer group to **Go, tell these things to James and to the brethren.** Peter wants James to know that their prayers have been answered. It implies that the leadership of James was behind these prayers. You look through the book of Acts, and then you analyze that last chapter of the book of James and you will discover that James had a passion for prayer.

### **1. Application: How foundational is prayer for you?**

And I believe prayer is an indicator of the degree to which we find our callings and burdens to truly be from God. You won't necessarily have travailing prayer like James did, but a deep burden from God (which is part of calling) casts us on our knees. The calling that God gives to us is a calling that requires His help. It is almost always a call that stretches our faith. This is true of your callings as parents. What parent is adequate for the things that we are called as parents to do? I'm not. I am cast upon my knees. It's true of your relationship to the church. It is true of the way God wants you to engage in business. If you want to succeed in business as Joseph did (where everything his hand touched prospered) then you need the Spirit's supernatural presence in your business dealings. And the more you walk close to God, the more you will realize that without Him you will not be able to accomplish your calling. The people who have had the greatest sense of their calling from God are the ones that have the greatest prayer life.

#### ***D. His passion for God's glory (Acts 15:14-18; James 1:1,9-11,17-18; 2:1; 4:4-12)***

The next thing that James had a passion for was God's glory. And this flowed very naturally from his prayer life. It is impossible to be consumed with a spirit of intercession as James was without at the same time being consumed with a passion for God's glory. The one leads irresistibly to the other. In the book of James, James was at war with anything that robbed God of His glory. In James 2 he says, **My brethren, do not hold the faith**



**of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality.** It's inconsistent with His glory. Pride is inconsistent with God's glory, and so James declares war on pride. He starts the epistle by declaring himself to be a slave of God and of Jesus Christ. He then immediately takes their eyes off of their own comforts and trials and onto God's purposes in bringing those comforts and trials. His argument in Acts 15 is an argument that flows from God's prophesies of His glory being extended through the world. It concerned James that God's glory among the Gentiles was being robbed by these Judaizers. If you want to be great in God's eyes, then be small in your own eyes; be a bonds slave of Jesus Christ and be passionate for His glory. Those are the people God loves to prosper.

***E. His passion for holiness (James 1:14-15,19-20; 2:9; 3:18; 4:8,17; 5:16,20)***

He also had a passion for holiness. Anyone who has read the book of James knows this to be true. You might think that a person who was in the temple in prayer so much that he was known as camel knees wouldn't be a very practical person. Perhaps you have heard the expression: "You are so heavenly minded that you are of no earthly good." But James would count that a false spirituality; a form of Gnosticism. James had no intention of escaping from the world, and the book of James is a powerful argument against such Gnosticism.

The book of James has been known as a book that describes faith in work boots. It is an incredibly practical book that promotes holiness in family, church, business and civic relations. James is known so much for his personal holiness that he was called "James the Righteous" and "James the Just" by even unbelievers. Twice he fondly refers to Old Testament law as "the perfect law of liberty." He loved the law of God. You cannot read the following verses from his book without realizing that James has a passion for holiness. And there isn't any misunderstanding of the Gospel that is going to keep him from pressing God's calls to holiness. Here's some sample verses:

**James 1:14-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted of God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.** In that whole section he is giving warnings of the disaster of giving in to sin.

**James 1:19-20 So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.**

**James 2:9 ...if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors.**

**James 3:18 Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

**James 4:8 Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse *your* hands, *you* sinners; and purify *your* hearts, *you* double-minded.**

**James 4:17 ¶ Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do *it*, to him it is sin.**

**James 5:16 Confess *your* trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.**

**James 5:20 let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins.**

We live in an age in which the church desperately needs to read James and recover its holiness. If our burden is only to correct the problems out there, we have not heard God's call correctly. For every finger that seeks to bring reform to the church and the world, there needs to be three fingers pointing back at ourselves. Like James, we must personally have a passion for holiness.

### ***F. His passion for grace (James 4:6 in light of book; Acts 15:14-29)***

#### **1. Keep in mind our previous demonstration that James did not disagree with Paul (Acts 15:24)**

Of course, the only way we will be able to be holy is if we have tasted deeply of God's grace. And James holds grace and holiness together beautifully. First, I want to remind you that James had never disagreed with Paul's Gospel. Not at all. In Acts 15, after all the debate has died down, James says in Acts 15:24-26, **Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law" – to whom we gave no such commandment - it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. They were united in this Gospel endeavor.**

**2. James 2 is not a contradiction of Paul, but is discussing two of the four aspects of justification that Scripture talks about: 1) justification of a sinner apart from works in 2:23 when Abraham was 85 years old and 2) justification of a saved saint in 2:21 by works/evidence when Abraham was 125 years old (40 years later).<sup>2</sup>**

Nor did James 2 contradict Paul. James is just as passionate about the true Gospel of grace as Paul was. You could not get a more Pauline statement of justification by faith alone than James 2:23, which says, **And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” And he was called the friend of God.** That was an instantaneous justification by faith alone. No works. Faith alone. People always bring up verse 21 which says, **Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar?** But when did Abraham offer his son Isaac? It was 40 years after he was justified by faith alone. But that is a different justification that occurred 40 years later when he offered up Isaac. The first justification was a legal declaration by God from His courtroom. No one saw it. It was an invisible declaration. And once that declaration was made, Abraham never again had to face an angry judge. Instead, he became a friend of God (verse 23). That’s James’ message. And that’s exactly the message of Paul.

But the second justification that James refers to happened 40 years later, and was evidential justification – not before God, but before man. You will remember from the outline that the Old Testament speaks of four kinds of justification. We are justified judicially by God’s declaration (Rom. 8:30,33). We are justified meritoriously by Christ’s obedience (Rom 3:24 and many other passages). We are justified mediately by faith alone (Rom. 3:28; James 2:23). And we are justified evidentially by works (James 2:21). All four can be found in the Old Testament.

And that last justification – the one by works - was *not* a declaration of God. It wasn’t in the courtroom. In fact, Abraham had gotten out of the court room 40 years earlier and had been transferred from being an unjustified enemy to being a justified friend. So what James is saying is that all truly justified people will have a faith that eventually produces righteous good works. Works are the only demonstration that others can see that we are justified Christians. That’s why Jesus said, **“by their fruits you will know them.”** In another place Jesus said, **wisdom is justified by her children.** We can’t read their heart and see if they have faith. But if we don’t

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<sup>2</sup> See outline on James 2 at the end of this section.

see good works, we know they don't have saving faith. It's the evidence. James says, **I will show you my faith by my works.** If there are no works, it is evident that there was no faith, and thus that there was no judicial declaration that we are acquitted. As the Reformers worded it, "We are justified by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone." That's James' point – justification is always connected with a transformed lifestyle. And that's Paul's message as well.

### **3. The book of James speaks of God's grace transforming us from the inside out and transforming families, churches, business and cultures.**

So neither Paul nor James limit God's grace to justification by faith. There is sanctification and glorification – and all is by grace. His grace empowers us to do what we could not do in ourselves. James doesn't want a dead formalism. Faith without works is dead. To have the kind of family changing, church changing and culture changing actions that James talks about, you have to experience the power of God's grace. And he was passionate about that grace in the book of James. It was this passion that made such a difference in the lives of his people. Programs don't make people hunger for the reality of God within our lives. It's *seeing* the reality in somebody else that makes us hunger for the same. "Lord, I want the reality of the supernatural power that I see in that person." James had it. And it is my prayer that each one of us would have the same reality.

#### **G. His passion for unity (James 2:1-4:17; 5:16-20; Acts 15)**

Another thing that he was passionate about was unity. James has listened to his brother Jesus' prayer for unity. And he displays it in Acts 15 where he presides over the biggest potential church split ever, and successfully brought the church to unity. He wasn't interested simply in winning. He could have won the battle easily. All James and the other apostles would have had to do was make a declaration – this is the way it is; shape up or ship out. But a lot of people would have likely shipped out. In a pastoral way he helped them all to process through the issues for themselves so that the right decision became their owned decision, not simply a blind following of leadership. In the book of James, he tries to get the factions to quit being factions in the church. He has words for the rich and the poor. He has words to restore those who have fallen into sin. He speaks against favoritism in chapter 2. He was a model for promoting unity. And he makes

clear that true unity does not diminish doctrine or holiness. When President Bush recently said that all religions have the same God and go to heaven, he was promoting a false unity that does not even remotely resemble that of James.

### ***H. His passion for transformation of culture (James 1:1b in light of book)***

Two more passions that I won't spend much time on: He was passionate about seeing culture transformed. In James 1, the second half of verse 1, he addresses his Jewish congregation that had been scattered abroad throughout the Gentile world. And his admonitions to them are admonitions that have culture changing power in a pagan world. We may feel pretty discouraged when we look at the state of the church and the state of America. But James calls us to stop looking at possibilities from man's perspective and to have faith in what God can do. In James 5 he doesn't tell us that Elijah was a super-hero who was impossible to imitate, and that's why his prayers were answered. He says, **Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced fruit.** James is saying, "I want you guys to have prayers like that." We need to start having faith in what God can do rather than being like the ten spies who were convinced that they couldn't take the land of Canaan.

### ***I. His passion for Jewish evangelism (Acts 15:20-21,29; 21:21-25; Gal. 2:9)***

His last passion was for Jewish evangelism. He had been commissioned to win the Jews, according to Galatians 2:9. Though he shows sensitivity to the Gentiles in Acts 15, his letter and advice show a heart that is concerned that Jews not be needlessly alienated. He wants to win them. You see that especially in Acts 21. We won't go into it now, but I think he is a model for us to desire to win the lost. And he is also a model for what a difference a clear cut sense of calling can make in our lives.

## **VI. His death (Revelation 11:1-13??; James 1:9-11,12; 2:26; 4:13-17; 5:8-9) ??**

### ***A. Historical testimony of James' martyrdom.***

But let me end briefly with a mention of his death. Some believe that the Bible does not mention his death. There are others who are convinced that James was one of the two martyrs being described in Revelation 11. I'm

not going to try to settle that debate this morning. But let me read you the account of an early historian by the name of Hegesippus. He wrote this history somewhere around 165-175 AD. He claimed to have first century sources for this. Hegesippus said,

[W]hen many even of the rulers believed, there was a commotion among the Jews and Scribes and Pharisees, who said that there was danger that the whole people would be looking for Jesus as the Christ. Coming therefore in a body to James they said, “We entreat thee, restrain the people; for they are gone astray in regard to Jesus, as if he were the Christ. We entreat thee to persuade all that have come to the feast of the Passover concerning Jesus; for we all have confidence in thee. For we bear thee witness, as do all the people, that thou art just, and dost not respect persons. Do thou therefore persuade the multitude not to be led astray concerning Jesus. For the whole people, and all of us also, have confidence in thee. Stand therefore upon the pinnacle of the temple, that from that high position thou mayest be clearly seen, and that thy words may be readily heard by all the people. For all the tribes, with the Gentiles also, are come together on account of the Passover.”

*The aforesaid Scribes and Pharisees therefore placed James upon the pinnacle of the temple, and cried out to him and said: “Thou just one, in whom we ought all to have confidence, forasmuch as the people are led astray after Jesus, the crucified one, declare to us, what is the gate of Jesus.” And he answered with a loud voice, “Why do ye ask me concerning Jesus, the Son of Man? He himself sitteth in heaven at the right hand of the great Power, and is about to come upon the clouds of heaven.” And when many were fully convinced and gloried in the testimony of James, and said, “Hosanna to the Son of David,” these same Scribes and Pharisees said again to one another, “We have done badly in supplying such testimony to Jesus. But let us go up and throw him down, in order that they may be afraid to believe him.” And they cried out, saying, “Oh! oh! The just man is also in error.” And they fulfilled the Scripture written in Isaiah, “Let us take away the just man, because he is troublesome to us: therefore they shall eat the fruit of their doings.” So they went up and threw down the just man, and said to each other, “Let us stone James the Just.” And they began to stone him, for he was not killed by the fall; but he turned and knelt down and said, “I entreat thee, Lord God our Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And while they were thus stoning him one of the priests of the sons of Rechab, the son of the*

Rechabites, who are mentioned by Jeremiah the prophet, cried out, saying, "Cease, what do ye? The just one prayeth for you." *And one of them, who was a fuller, took the club with which he beat out clothes and struck the just man on the head. And thus he suffered martyrdom.* And they buried him on the spot, by the temple, and his monument still remains by the temple. He became a true witness, both to Jews and Greeks, that Jesus is the Christ. And immediately Vespasian besieged them."<sup>3</sup>

### **B. Secrets of how James could face death so triumphantly.**

But what is clear from the Scripture is that James was able to die with a sense of God's presence because he had learned to live with a sense of God's presence. And his life illustrates several secrets that can help us face death triumphantly.

#### **1. James knew that life is short and cannot be held in our hands (James 1:9-11; 4:14)**

In James 1:9-11 James likens the shortness of our lives to a flower and to grass, both of which spring up and then quickly wither. We don't have a long life. In James 4:14 he says, **For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.** You know – you are out in freezing weather, and you breath, and a little cloud of vapor appears. And just as quickly as it appeared, it vanishes away. That's the way our lives are. And yet many of us act as if this vapor is the most important thing. That's what we are trying to hold onto. James did not. He realized that we must always live in light of eternity. So much of what people do on earth will not count for eternity, which means that it will evaporate. James could have listened to these leaders and spared his life for a while. But James was prepared to die because he knew what was important in life and what was not important. The testimony of man is not important. He knew he had to die anyway. What better way to die than as a testimony that would win others lives to Christ.

#### **2. James looked forward to heaven (James 1:12)**

A second thing that we see is that James looked forward to heaven. While he did all that he could to make a difference in time, James 1:12 says that it was eternity that gave him the perseverance to endure hardship now. **Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been**

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<sup>3</sup> Hegesippus, Quoted by Eusebius, *History*, 2:23:4-18

**approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him.** My father lived life to the fullest because he knew that what we do on earth affects where we start in heaven. He believed strongly in the doctrine of rewards and laying up treasure in heaven. He looked forward to heaven. You will be prepared to die when you begin to look with anticipation to heaven.

### **3. James knew that the body is not all that we have. Nor is it the most important. (James 2:26; Matt. 10:28; Luke 12:4; 3 John 2)**

A third thing that prepared James for death was the realization that this body is not all we have. James 2:26 says, **the body without the spirit is dead...** It's not the body that animates the spirit. It is the spirit that animates the body. It is the spirit which is enduring. Yet how many times do we act as if all that matters is sleeping, eating, pleasure, rest and work with our bodies. When your body is the main focus of your concern, you will have more concern for persecution because it is taking those things away. But Jesus said, **do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell** (Matt. 10:28). In another place Jesus said, **do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do** (Luke 12:4). The body is not all that we have. If we would nurture our souls as much as we do our bodies, we would grow like crazy. It's not as if the body is unimportant. 3 John 2 says, **Beloved, I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers.** He wants us to prosper in every area. But if God literally answered that prayer for many of us, we would be financially ruined, ruined in health, ruined in our social relations and every area of life. Why? Because we have neglected our soul's prosperity. If He prospered your health and finances *just as your soul is prospering*, where would you be? Value your soul.

### **4. Though we cannot control our future, God is in total control (James 4:13-17)**

The fourth thing that enabled James to be prepared for death was the realization that his future was totally controlled by God, but not by James. In James 4 he says, **Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow.** You could walk off a curb and get run over by a chariot. He's not saying you can't plan. In fact, he insists that we must plan. But our planning must



include an “If the Lord will, we will do such and such.” Many years before people might have assumed that James would be killed when he stayed in Jerusalem. But he wasn’t. He had been spared death previously. He knew that God controlled the future and you can’t die one moment sooner than it is God’s time to go. That gives confidence. I was a belief in the sovereignty of God that enabled Calvinists to go into battle with ferocity and confidence.

### **5. The character issues we have seen in James in the previous two sermons.**

The fifth thing that enabled James to die such a glorious death was his humility that we looked at two weeks ago, his passion for God’s glory, and his desire for the extension of Christ’s kingdom, his passion for lost souls. In other words, he did not live for self. His focus was outward. Even when his body was mangled and bleeding, he was praying for the salvation of his persecutors. If you fear death, start asking God to help you focus on the needs of others – to have an outward focus. It will help to dissolve your fears. Start praying that God would be glorified.

### **6. The nearness of God**

The last thing that helped him be bold in the face of death was the constant realization that God the Judge was at hand (James 5:8-9); He is close. He does not abandon His own. And God was controlling everything for His own glory. Even his martyrdom brought souls to salvation.

James was not a perfect man. We saw that on week #1 in this series. But James was a model of what it can mean to grow from the cynicism he had as an unbeliever to hope; to grow from envy to self-giving; from lack of zeal for Christ to living passionately for him. Pray that God would produce such transformation in each of us. Amen.

Children of God, I charge you to imitate the passion of James’ life.  
Amen.