

# An Introduction to James and His Epistle

*Epistle of James*  
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I invite you to turn with me in your Bibles to the book of James, James 1. The epistle of James is where I think we need to go as a congregation right now. It's been a slow decision for me. Oh, kids need to be dismissed. I guess the Spirit was moving and they already knew.

The decision to go with the book of James, I prayed about it for some time, actually just even this week was still wrestling with two or three different options and just really felt like that as I considered different things that this is something that I, myself, need and I think our congregation needs. James is an intensely practical book. It is, in a sense, in a word, the theme of the book is to be a doer of the word. Be a doer, not merely a hearer. And it offers an interesting balance to much of the rest of the New Testament. It's actually something that the balance is so dramatic that during the Reformation Martin Luther really struggled with the book of James. He struggled particularly with James 2:14-26 where the author, James, makes clear that it's not just faith but it's faith that works. Faith without works is dead, he makes the point, and he uses the phrase "you're justified by works." Now it's not a contradiction, it's one of those antinomies, at first glance it looks like a contradiction but it's not at all a contradiction. He doesn't contradict Paul when Paul maintains that we are justified by faith apart from works, Romans 3:28. And the formula since the Reformation we have used to articulate the Gospel, the good news of salvation is that sinners are justified by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. James doesn't contradict that, he complements it. He completes it.

You'll see as we get into chapter 2, he doesn't contradict it at all when you read carefully what he's saying, but what he's saying is that those who profess faith must demonstrate the fruits of faith, and actually if you think about the equation of salvation, salvation of legalistic professing Christians, Roman Catholicism, some other spurious manifestations of Christianity, alleged Christianity, will say faith plus works equals salvation. Faith plus works equals salvation. When you really understand what they're saying, that's what they're saying, that you can believe but also must do the things like the sacraments of the Catholic Church. You must go through periods in purgatory to be purified. Faith, yes, believe in Jesus but do all of these other things and then maybe you'll be justified.

The biblical Gospel, what the Bible teaches is faith alone. On this side of the equation there is just faith equals salvation plus works, that is, the way that you receive true salvation is by faith alone. You put all of your trust in the finished work of one man, the God-man Christ Jesus, and everything that he has done; you place all of your hope in him realizing you have nothing to bring and the empty outstretched hand of a beggar reaching out, that's what faith is, reaching out for what only God can give. Salvation is granted to you but when that happens, you've had a heart change and there will be evidence of new life so that that faith will work itself out in practice.

That's what Paul teaches and that's what James teaches. They just come at it from different sides of the same essential Gospel truth which the Scripture does often. I mean, there are balancing truths all throughout Scripture. God is sovereign, man is responsible. Those two things are both true. Certain passages emphasize one over the other but when you read the Bible as you're supposed to read it, letting Scripture interpret Scripture, not just ignoring, you know, take one passage and ignore the rest which is what heretics do. They take Scripture out of context, they twist and distort it and it leads to the destruction of the souls of men. Scripture must be interpreted in context, in context of the particular paragraph you're reading, in context to the book you're reading, and in context to the whole of the Bible. God does not contradict himself. God for whom it is impossible to lie, cannot contradict himself and so Scripture does not.

James is practical and you're going to see it's much different than reading a Pauline epistle. Much different. You'll see that James, as we go through this, and you've read it but maybe you haven't read it recently. When you read it, you see that James is less interested to inform you than he is to instruct you. It's not that he doesn't inform you because he will often attach information behind his instructions, the reason you should do this, he'll give it to you afterwards, but he starts with the instruction. Paul generally starts with the information and then he gets to the instructions and he lays on the instructions when he gets there. That's his general pattern. But both are men of God inspired by the Holy Spirit to give us God's perfect word and in this, I think you see again the beauty of Scripture, that 40 different authors, 40 different men, different personalities, different ways of thinking and yet God inspired them to give us one perfect book, the Bible. Yes, it's complementary. God, he created....

I remember years ago hearing a pastor preach on the inerrancy of Scripture and pointing out how you see different personalities in Scripture and, you know, Amos writes differently than Isaiah. Amos was a fisherman, Isaiah was apparently of the priestly class and so he writes very differently. Isaiah writes differently than Moses. Of course. But this pastor said but you have to understand that when God wanted a book of, say God wanted Psalms like we get from David, he created and orchestrated the life of David perfectly to bring him, to form the man that would give us the Psalms. The same thing is true of James. He worked in his life sovereignly to give us this precious book of Scripture.

Luther did have some problems with it. He called it an epistle of straw because he was dealing with the error of Roman Catholicism, that faith plus works equals salvation, and so when he read James 2 he struggled with it a little bit, it took him a while but he clearly

believed it was always canonical. In fact, it's been estimated he quoted over half of James's 108 verses in his own writings. He was constantly referring to the book of James to defend his points as he was preaching, as he was teaching, as he was writing. He just wrestled with it a little bit. And aren't there some books that you find that way a little bit too? I mean, I know for a long time I wrestled with Romans 9. I wasn't very friendly with Romans 9 for a long time, but now I love it. And I think when we get to heaven, we're going to realize we love all of God's word and if the Lord let's us live to be older and wiser, we come to love even most sweetly and dearly the things we first found most difficult or offensive. The beauty of God in his word.

So I chose it because it's practical and I think that I want to be a doer of the word, I think we need to be doers of the word. You know, one of the dangers is receiving and informing and always learning but never coming to a knowledge of the truth; not living out your faith. We can be spiritually like the Dead Sea. You know, the Dead Sea at the end of the Jordan River, there in Palestine God has this word picture there, a living word picture, visible word picture. The Dead Sea, water flows in but no water flows out because it's so low below sea level. Everywhere else is up and so the water flows in. The only way the water doesn't just keep filling up is evaporation. But the content, the salt content of the Dead Sea is so great that it doesn't sustain life. So if things are always flowing in, nothing is going out, it has a deadening effect upon a Christian life. So James is here to remedy that problem and we'll be blessed, I trust, by God's Spirit in his word as we work through this.

So this morning our text is James 1:1.

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

Let's pray together.

*Our Father, we rejoice in your grace and the glorious salvation which you have made known to us in Jesus Christ, the victory that he has won at Calvary and as we just heard sung about at the empty tomb. We come this morning asking you to help us to love him more truly and to truly serve him in a more worthy manner, more worthy of the great sacrifice that he's made for us. Help us live out our love to him. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

The title of the message, then, just is "An Introduction to James and His Epistle." An introduction to James and his epistle and it's James 1:1. So I've got four points this morning as a way of introducing the book of James and the first is the author of the message. The author of the message. The author of the book. The message of the book of James.

The author of the message. Now, we know the Scriptures tell us it's James but which James? James who? There are really three realistic possibilities for the authorship of James but it's pretty well established there. I'm going to give you the one I think that

evangelicals uniformly almost unanimously agree on. But anyway, there are actually four Jameses in the New Testament that are mentioned. There is James the son of Zebedee. That is James the brother of John the apostle that wrote the Gospel of John. Remember James and John are brothers. James, the son of Zebedee, was one of the apostles, one of the three in the inner circle: John, James and Peter. Was it James the son of Zebedee? Well, he was martyred very early and we don't believe it was him for other reasons too. There is a second James, the disciple James, the son of Alphaeus. Another disciple, there were two disciples named James. Possibly but I think we'll see I don't believe it was James, the son of Alphaeus. Thirdly, I mentioned there are four because Judas, one of the disciples, not Judas Iscariot, the other Judas. There were a couple of Judases and a couple of Jameses among the disciples and the Judas, not Iscariot's dad's name was James. We're told in one verse in the listing of the apostles, the disciples, that Judas, the son of James.

So those are the only four you have in the New Testament. Not that it would have to be those but it's by and large we would expect that and, of course, I'll add the fourth one. James and the one I believe it is, James, the brother of Jesus of Nazareth. James the brother of Christ himself. We believe it is James, the brother of Christ, because James, the brother of Christ, was an apostle and he's referred as an apostle to us in Scripture in Galatians 1:19.

Turn there and we'll move around a little bit as we continue this introduction. So Galatians 1:19 when Paul is talking about his conversion and he's writing his epistle to the Galatians and he's sort of appealing to their need to listen to him as one who is truly an apostle himself, he shares about his conversion and then he says in Galatians 1:18 at three years after he had returned to Damascus, "I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas," he wanted to go and see Peter, Cephas, another word for Peter. He wanted to go and see Peter after, remember, Saul the persecutor has become Paul the apostle. Very early in his faith. Verse 19, "But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother." So he saw Peter and he saw James.

The apostle, Paul refers to him as an apostle. Now he wasn't one of the 12. He wasn't one of the 12 disciples but he, to give the title of apostle, he's saying James was directly commissioned by Jesus himself to represent him. That's what apostle means. It comes from the Greek verb, "apostello," which means "to be sent from." Stelo, send. Apo, from. Sent from with authority. So he says James is an apostle. I went to see him and this James I'm talking about is the Lord's brother.

Now wait a minute, the Lord had brothers? Yes, he did. Sometimes this is misunderstood even in some Protestant circles because there is a misinterpretation of Matthew 1:25. You may have heard of the doctrine of the perpetual virginity of Mary. The perpetual virginity of Mary. This is a doctrine that came into some popularity in the fourth century and the idea was that Mary, because she was the mother of the Son of God, never consummated her marriage with Joseph. She remained a virgin perpetually. Now, it's based upon a misinterpretation of this verse, Matthew 1:25. This is, remember, Joseph has the dream where the angel comes to him and says, "You don't need to worry about marrying Mary. Behold, what's happened is the Holy Spirit, God has caused Mary to conceive by the

Holy Spirit," verse 20. And verse 25, after the angel leaves, Joseph wakes from his sleep and verse 25, after he took Mary as his wife "but he kept her a virgin until she gave birth to a Son."

Now, you read that verse, isn't that pretty clear? He kept her a virgin, what? Until she gave birth. He did not consummate his marriage before she gave birth. It doesn't say Mary was perpetually a virgin. It says until. Now you would just look at that and say, "Well, I would expect that Mary and Joseph consummated their marriage and had other children." Well, you would expect that and you would find that that's true. What happened is some theologian read that, misinterpreted it and then later it became canon in the Catholic Church but it's not.

Keep reading your Bible. Turn over to chapter 12, verse 46. The same author, Matthew, tells us in chapter 12, verse 46, "While He," that is, Jesus, "was still speaking to the crowds, behold, His mother and brothers were standing outside, seeking to speak to Him." Mary and Jesus' brothers come and they want to talk to him. "Someone said to Him, 'Behold, Your mother and Your brothers are standing outside seeking to speak to You.' But Jesus said, 'Who is My mother and who are My brothers but those who do the will of My Father who in heaven.'" At this point the mother and brothers are apparently coming, we don't know why they were coming, probably their motives weren't as spiritual as they needed to be. Maybe they were, "Hey, we've got some problems at home. We need you to come and fix them." I don't know or maybe it was just that, "You're making too much of a scene." And the brothers we find out other places were resistant to him. But for whatever reason they had come and Jesus basically uses that opportunity to say, "Listen, though they truly are my brothers and my mother and I love them, the kingdom of God is so much more important. What I've come to do is to bring other people into my family and who is my family but the ones who do the will of my Father? Who are my true brothers but those who believe?" He uses that opportunity.

Now, turn over to chapter 13. Later he's speaking in Nazareth, his hometown. We know from Matthew, Mark and Luke that his reception was not good in his hometown. We see this here in Matthew 13:53, "When Jesus had finished these parables, He departed from there. He came to His hometown," this is Matthew 13:54, "He came to his hometown and began teaching them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His mother called Mary, and His brothers, James and Joseph and Simon and Judas?'" We know this guy. You remember, he's the one, he's the carpenter's son. Remember Mary has the four brothers. It goes on to say, "And His sisters, are they not all with us?" Mary had four other sons plus daughters like you would expect any good Jewish family to have in that day.

James and Judas later give us parts of the Bible. The next to the last book in the New Testament, Jude, is that written by Jude, Judas, another way of saying the same name. A lot gets lost sometimes in the way that names are transliterated at times from Hebrew to Greek and then to English and, in fact, I'll just throw this out at you. I'm not going to spend a lot of time talking about it, just so you don't get thrown by it. The name James,

when you look at the Greek text, it actually says Iacobus, which is transliterating the Hebrew word "Yaakov, Jacob." Everywhere you read James in the New Testament it's actually Jacob. Now, what happened, this is the way language is developed, it's about English, it's not about the Greek or the Hebrew, and basically, essentially, Jacob went through Latin and became Iacobus or some way, a little different, I forget exactly what it did. It actually got an "m" in there somehow in Latin. Then that "m" grew into two "m's" in French. Then the English turned it into James. So now that we have, we have boys named Jacob and they're named James but actually in Bible times they would have been named the same thing. The same name. So, like you shouldn't name your sons, if you've named your sons James and Jacob, you made a really big faux pas. It's James, it's Larry and my brother Darryl and my other brother Darryl. But James is essentially Jacob. It's Anglicized because the Bible is being translated into English, we translate the word into our language. Juan, John, right? It's the same kind of thing. Okay.

Now, so Jude and James both became authors of Scripture and it's interesting because at this point we're told that, you know, they're there in chapter 13, verse 55, "Is this not the carpenter's son," but then turn over to John 7 and we're going to see how really we have a clear picture of how they were responding to Jesus, his brothers. Jesus was back in Galilee because the Jews were seeking to kill him we're told in verse 1. The Feast of Booths was near and look at verse 3, John 7:3, "Therefore His brothers said to Him, 'Leave here and go into Judea, so that Your disciples also may see Your works which You are doing. For no one does anything in secret when he himself seeks to be known publicly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.'" Why are you up here in Capernaum? Why are you up here in Galilee, Jesus? You're doing all these signs, you're teaching all this stuff, go to Jerusalem. It sounds like maybe, "Hey, we're helping you out with your ministry," but in reality, they are hating him and despising him.

Look at verse 5, John shows us this, "For not even His brothers were believing in Him." They were mocking him. "If you're really all that you say you are, why aren't you at the feast in Jerusalem?" They weren't believing in him. Just as Jesus had said, I didn't read this part in Matthew 13, he goes on to say that the prophet is not without honor in his own hometown and among his own family. A prophet always has honor except in his own hometown and with his own family. He didn't have honor with his family. They were rejecting him.

So how is it that they went from rejecting him to worshiping him as their Lord and God? That's the question because it happens, we don't see the account of it in the New Testament very directly but we see that right after the early church is formed, James, the brother of Jesus who was among those mocking him and rejecting him, has now become a follower of Jesus. We see this in Acts 12. Remember when Peter was imprisoned and he was probably going to be executed before Herod and the angel comes in and leads him out of the prison? Then he goes to the place where the disciples had been praying for him, like an all-night prayer vigil going on, praying for Peter. He goes to the door and a servant girl named Rhoda goes down to answer the door. Hearing his voice through the door, she's so excited that she doesn't...I mean, he's like [knocking] "Everybody is looking for me. Let me in. Let me in." And she gets so excited that she, "It's Peter!" and

she runs off and doesn't open the door and she goes and tells the disciples, "Peter is here!" and they say, "You're out of your mind. What are you talking about?" And she went slightly out of her mind, I guess, but she runs back downstairs, opens the door and brings him in and the first thing Peter says after, verse 16, "Peter continued knocking." She's left. He's, "Hey, somebody else let me in!" "When they had opened the door, they saw him and were amazed. But motioning to them with his hand to be silent, he described to them how the Lord had led him out of the prison. And he said, 'Report these things to James and the brethren.'" James is already the leader of the Jerusalem church. Astonishing. You see, something happened. James became an apostle. He went from being an unbeliever to not only being a believer but being one sent by Jesus with authority.

We see it again in chapter 15. We won't bother reading there. They have the Council of Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas have been off preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles. The Gentiles are getting saved like crazy. The Jews that are in these other towns are worried because, hey, these Gentiles are coming to faith and here they are, they're not knowing how to live as godly Jews and they need to be circumcised. They're eating all kinds of stuff. This is a mess. And so they have the Council of Jerusalem to decide, "What are we going to do with these Gentiles coming into the people of God?" And at a key moment after Peter has, Paul and Barnabas have shared a lot, Peter has made an articulate statement for accepting the Gentiles because God has accepted the Gentiles, it's all settled, so to speak, when James gets up and affirms what Peter said. James is the leader of the Jerusalem church, on equal standing with the apostles.

How did that happen? How did he go from being someone who because of the proximity of Jesus and being around him, not being able to possibly imagine that, "My brother is the King of kings and Lord of lords"? How did he come to suddenly believe it? We're told in 1 Corinthians 15, turn to 1 Corinthians 15. What was it that made this dramatic change in James' life? How did he go from being an unbeliever to being a follower of Jesus who in James 1 says, our text said, how did he identify himself? "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." That is, "James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." Jesus of Nazareth is the Christ, he's the Messiah, and he is Lord. He is Yahweh. He is my God.

How did that happen? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15. In fact, if you start in verse 3, he explains his Gospel, "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received," here is the kernel of the Gospel, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised," 1 Corinthians 15:4, "He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and after that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve," including those two Jameses we mentioned earlier. "After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also," Paul says.

One day James hearing about what was going on, hearing about all this commotion, probably still rejecting what's being said about his brother who had died, one day the

risen Christ appears to him directly and personally, one-on-one visitation, he said, "He appeared to James," and James must have responded like Thomas did when he beheld the wounds, looked into the eyes of his brother. I mean, think about what it was like to grow up with a brother like Jesus. I mean, honestly. You're a sinner, he's not. He always does what mom tells him to do. You never do. And we think James was probably the oldest after Jesus; he was the first son born to Mary and Joseph of their union. Jesus is always telling him what to do too, I mean, in a loving way but he says, "Hey, James, you need to straighten up," and there must have been a ring of authority about that that you wouldn't like in your brother.

And for whatever reason, the blindness, the bitterness, obviously, the very fact of light every day, he saw the glory of Christ every day of his life, his holiness, and light rejected leads to darkness, and so he became more and more in the dark in rejecting Jesus, not being willing to receive the fact that he is who he claims to be after he started making that known, he didn't make it known until he was thirty and he begins his public ministry. They should have been saying, "Yes, we know. We've seen the Lamb without spot or blemish." But he's in the dark until one day the darkness is pierced by the light of the glory of the risen Christ and this man, James, was never the same again.

He saw his brother, his Lord, his God, and his brother, his Lord, his God said, "You follow me. I'm calling you to be an apostle and to take the Gospel," and apparently, he called him to take the Gospel to the Jews. "You take the Gospel to my people." James from what we can tell from the historical records never left Jerusalem. He stayed in Jerusalem preaching the Gospel and leading the church there in Jerusalem until he died in 62 AD. And do you know how he died? He died as a martyr. He was stoned to death by the Pharisees and the rulers of Jerusalem, the rulers of the temple. He died being faithful to bear witness. "I know whom I have believed and I will not deny him. He is not just my brother, he's my God."

Now, you think about a man like that that went through the change that he went through and he, then God puts him in the place of being the leader of the church. I mean, the apostles are going out and James is shepherding the believers in Jerusalem, and he is burdened for their well-being. Now there are many Jews that are rejecting the Gospel but there's a significant number, remember those 3,000 that were saved at Pentecost. Those are Jews. He's shepherding them. His heart is to help them. And then as we read on through Acts, we see in Acts 11... The author of the message is James. That's point 1.

We've got to really move fast. Point 2: the recipients of the message. This is a general epistle, that is, it's not written in the same way that many of the Pauline epistles are. The number of general epistles, starting with Hebrews all the way to Jude, a general epistle means it's not written specifically to a person or a specific church or a city, churches in a city. I mean, think about Paul wrote to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, individuals, right? He also wrote to the Corinthians, the Philippians, the Colossians, you know, you get the idea, churches in a specific area. The general epistles, James, 1 & 2 Peter, Jude, 1, 2, 3 John, were written to broader groups of Christians. And James, he tells us who he's writing to but it's still a broader group. There is no personal, like, he greets somebody



because he's writing to a specific church member, Paul does that at the beginning. You know, "I've wanted to come. I'm sending this person to you. Hey, greet this one and this one and this one and this one." There's none of that in James and there's none of that in the general epistles.

But he says he's writing, "To the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad: Greetings." What he's saying there, the 12 tribes is he's speaking spiritually about Israel and the true Israel now, for him, I think what he means here is the Jews who now believe in the Messiah. And he uses the phrase "the 12 tribes" which was kind of an eschatological term because the 10 tribes have been basically annihilated or just disintegrated in the first destruction of the northern kingdom, when the northern kingdom fell. So the 12 tribes coming back together was a picture of what God would do when he sent Christ. In the last days when Christ comes, he will regather the 12 tribes. The Jews will finally be what they were created to be, the people of God under their Messiah, under their Christ. So James is using that, a term that would have been familiar to Jewish Christians, and he says, "I'm writing to all of you who are dispersed abroad."

Dispersed abroad. I think the key here is, I think he's writing actually, I accept what most of the commentators say that he's writing to Jews that have been dispersed through the early persecution of the church in Jerusalem. You know, we read about in chapter 8 when Paul is involved in persecution and then they leave Jerusalem, Christians start fleeing Jerusalem and they spread out through Samaria and then into Syria and finally over into Asia Minor. They're on the run and they go and settle in other places. He's speaking to those who had been saved like at Pentecost, saved shortly afterwards. The church had been thriving in Jerusalem, persecution came and they were dispersed abroad. So he's writing with a shepherd's heart to many of those that he had shepherded but those who have also come to faith through the witness of them, other Jews in other places.

One more point for why I think he's writing to Jews is in chapter 2, verse 2, he says, "For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes," the word "assembly" is used uniquely in the epistles by James here and the word literally in the Greek is "synagogue, sunagoge." The synagogue is never used by the other authors to speak of a Christian assembly. Now, Paul when he would go out preaching the Gospel, he would go to the Jewish synagogue first and preach, he'd usually get thrown out pretty quickly and then he'd preach to the Gentiles. The synagogue was not a welcoming place except among some little clusters of Jews where there were in certain places synagogues that had been mostly converted and so their churches, Jewish churches are meeting in the synagogue. Totally Jewish churches in certain places, and particularly those that left Jerusalem had formed Jewish synagogues.

So anyway for all that to say: it's a general epistle written to Jewish believers who had been dispersed, persecuted, and James is writing to encourage them. Times are tough. They've been displaced. Persecution is going to get more and more and more intense for Jewish believers in Jesus. That's why almost all the apostles were martyred, except for John. From what we know, all of them died martyr's deaths and so many Christians died martyr's death, and particularly Jewish Christians. Not just exclusively Christians in

general but it got harder and harder and harder to be a Jewish follower of Jesus because the Jews by and large rejected the Messiah and therefore they rejected those who loved him.

Now, the content of the message. Very practical. Organizationally there is kind of a loose structure. It's one of the more loose structures of all the epistles. It's really more like Proverbs. As you read it, you read one section and then what led from this section to that section? Sometimes you feel like, well, apparently, he's just like, "I want to talk about this. Now I want to talk about this because you need to know about this and this." Paul would tie it together a little more elegantly. James thinks differently.

He basically is teaching that faith doesn't remain alone. The key part is chapter 2, verses 14 to 26: faith without works is dead. When you add that with "be doers of the word" you see what his main emphasis is: live out the Christian life. Be consistent. Let your life be consistent with your profession. You say you follow Jesus, show it and don't let the discouragement of having been displaced, having had hardship, pressures from the world, don't let worldliness come in. Be holy and devoted to such a glorious Savior. I mean, his love for Jesus is so evident. He says, you think about he was the brother of Jesus who did not accept Jesus. Look how he refers to Jesus. Chapter 2, verse 1, "My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism." Our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.

So the content of the message is: live out the Christian life. The character of the message. We looked at the author of the message, the recipients of the message, the content, we're going to spend a lot of time on that in weeks to come, that's why we're so short on that point. The character of the message. But just to help us kind of know where we're going, he's going to be challenging us to live out the Christian life. That's the content.

The character. In a word, it's pastoral. In tone, it's pastoral. There are evidences of this pastoral tone. He has a heart, a pastor's heart for these believers and you see it in five sub points quickly here. Five sub points and we'll hit them quickly. You see the affection of James for those he writes to, to whom he writes. Affection. The phrase "brothers" occurs 15 times in the book. Brothers. Eight of those times it says "my brothers." Three of those times it says "my beloved brothers." He's saying some hard stuff but he seasons it with "my brothers, my beloved brothers. I love you. You're my family." So you see the affection. That's the first sub point.

The character of the message is pastoral and you see it in his affection, secondly, in his authority. I mentioned he's not really trying to inform as much as he's trying to instruct. He does inform but his major is on instruction. This has, to my count, 41 imperatives in the book of James and as Douglas Moo writes in his commentary, "There is no New Testament writing that is as tightly packed with imperatives as James is." That is, more imperatives, more miles to the gallon, more imperatives to the gallon in James. He is trying to move the will, not just inform the mind. All of Scripture truly is trying to do that, you understand that. God doesn't tell you anything just to inform you. Every verse of

the Bible makes a claim on our hearts but James is just coming at it more directly from the claim rather than the information that leads to the claim.

So affection, authority. The character of the message is pastoral in tone because, first of all, you see his affection; secondly, his authority; thirdly, the character of the message is seen in its simplicity. Short sentences throughout the book. I mean, chapter 1, verse 19, "But everyone is to be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." Chapter 4, verse 7, "Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners." You see what he does, he does a sentence and he doesn't really expound on it. He just, bam! There it is. Do it. It's straightforward.

So his affection, his authority, his simplicity, fourthly, his clarity. He is one of the most vivid writers. Though he's being, in one sense, simple and he's not informing as much with the elegant long paragraphs that Paul has, but in another sense, he is an amazing communicator. He writes with such vivid imagery. I mean, illustration after illustration after illustration and the illustrations have, as I said earlier, the authority, he's connecting with the will, he's calling on the will, his illustrations and his tone really make a claim on the affections. They engage the emotions of the reader, the heart. He's trying to engage our hearts, move our wills so that our lives reflect what we say we believe.

I mean, you see this so many places. Think about chapter 3, look how he piles image upon image. He's talking about the tongue. He says, "I want you to understand," chapter 3, verse 1, "you need to be careful about becoming teachers because, my brethren, knowing that as such we'll incur a stricter judgment. For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says," if you can control your tongue you're "a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well." There's an image. "Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well." He's trying to tell us how important the tongue is. The tongue turns your whole life. Look at the power of the tongue. You put a bit, something small, and it directs a horse. That's pretty impressive. Look how big a horse is. That little bit, you turn him to go wherever you want him to go.

Then he says, "Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot desires. So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things." Here's another image. "See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!" You see this conflagration, this rushing out-of-control fire now. He's talking to you about your tongue but he wants you to see all of these images. The appeal to the heart.

Then he goes on and you see his authoritative tone. "And the tongue is a fire, the very world of iniquity; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our life, and is set on fire by hell." He does not pretty up the pictures. He's very plain spoken. It's beautiful how God uses different people. Paul wouldn't have said that that way but what Paul would have said would have been perfect, but the Lord knows we need James too and so he gives us this blessed brother.

So I said affection, authority, simplicity, clarity and intensity. I actually got into that point right there. You feel the intensity of what we were just talking about, don't you? You see it in what he says. In other ways you see it is he asks question after question after question after question. It's one of the most effective ways to engage people and express how urgent it is. He says in chapter 2, verse 14, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?" Sarcasm. Verses 18 and 19, he goes on to say, "someone may well say, 'You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.'" That's getting to the real what we said earlier, how it fits together. But look at verse 19, he's dealing with the person that just wants to have faith with no works. He says, "You believe that God is one." Hey, you believe that God is one. "You do well; the demons also believe, and tremble." You're doing great. You're believing exactly what the demons believe and you're counting on going to heaven on that kind of faith? Sarcasm. Godly sarcasm. Sarcasm is often used in a sinful way, right? But there are places where it's appropriate to show someone the foolishness of their actions and the Scripture does that at times. Foolishness of their thoughts.

And his boldness. I mean, he calls it like he sees it. In chapter 4 when he's talking about the conflicts that they have, in chapter 4, verse 4, he says, now he's been saying my brothers, my brothers, my brothers, "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God?" The intensity. You see, this man is captivated with a burden about the believers that he loves that are struggling to apply the Gospel to their lives and the Spirit inspiring him, he comes out with bold statements, questions, instructions, and he's calling on you and me, "If you say you know Jesus, if you believe that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners," we read a moment ago, the Gospel, "that he died to save sinners, that he rose again on the third day, that he reigns and rules over all eternity, that he is King of kings and Lord of lords, that he is truly not just a man, he's not just the Christ, he's not just the Son of God, he is God himself, then show me," James says, "show me by your life. If you've really encountered him, if you're really walking with him, how could it not show?" That's what he's saying. I don't know about you but that's convicting and I need that. So let's pray that God will help us to really hear his word and apply it so that our Savior will be glorified in holy people.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we praise you for your truth and your graciousness in speaking to us in human language, speaking to us exactly as we need through this precious word that is living and active, that it's sharper than any two-edged sword, it truly does pierce to dividing joints and marrow, soul and spirit, it is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart. Lord, keep letting your word loose in us. Cut. Do surgery. Remove the things that hinder us from loving you. For those that don't yet truly have changed hearts, may they come to have changed hearts even today, to repent and believe the Gospel, to place all of their hope in Jesus alone. Lord, for those of us who do know you but look at our lives and see*

*so many areas of inconsistency, so many areas where we've not lived out, worked out our salvation, break us, humble us, do whatever is necessary to move our hearts and our wills to bring honor to so great a Savior for we want his glory and we pray in his name. Amen.*