

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Introduction to James

James 1:1

Part 1

We come this morning to the Book of James. We are going to examine, in the months ahead five wonderful chapters. In order to maximize our benefit from this study, it is important for us to know the theme of this particular book. We need to understand the bigger picture before we can appreciate the individual parts.

What is the theme of James? The theme of James is: TESTS OF A LIVING FAITH. The Epistle of James demands that Christian faith must be functional. A living faith is a working faith. James' central aim in this epistle is to challenge the readers to test the validity of their faith. Hopefully in the months ahead this aim, this goal, will be worked out in each of our lives as we examine our so-called faith in light of the very pointed teachings of this book.

The genuineness of something valuable is attested to or affirmed through a process of examination or testing. Whether that is in respect to gold or to silver or to whatever. Anything that has value is subject to testing.

Recently 20/20 had an expose on precious stones that had been treated with plastic to fill various cracks but then were sold as flawless. This practice was not taking place in back alleys but in very reputable stores. People were being ripped off. If people did not take time to have these stones tested they would not know this. After seeing this episode, if I were to ever buy an expensive piece of jewelry with a so-called valuable stone, I know that I would certainly have it tested.

If this is true of precious stones, how much truly is this of so-called saving faith? If I buy a cracked stone and pay for a flawless stone I am only out a little bit of money. But if I assume my faith is genuine when it is not, the consequences are far more serious. This is why the testing of our faith is a very prominent theme throughout the Scriptures.

Certainly we see this emphasis on examination in various Old and New Testament verses.

Ps. 17:3, “Thou hast tried my heart; Thou hast visited me by night; Thou hast tested me and dost find nothing” In this passage we see God testing the heart.

Ps. 26:1-2, “Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity; And I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. (2) Examine me, O Lord, and try me; Test my mind and my heart.” In this passage we see David asking that God would test him.

Ps. 139: 23-24, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; (24) And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.” Again we see the David crying out to the Lord that he might be tested.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Lam. 3:40, “Let us examine and probe our ways, and let us return to the Lord.” This is an appeal from Jeremiah for Israel to examine herself and to test the validity of their relationship with God.

Ezek. 18:28 “Because he considered and turned away from all his transgressions which he had committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.” Ezekiel credits the salvation of a man to the fact that he was willing to take stock of his life and to act appropriately.

2 Cor. 13:5, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?”

Not only do we have many verses throughout the Scriptures that emphasize self examination but we have whole sections of Scripture dedicated to the various tests that we need to apply.

The Sermon on the Mount is one of those passages. Jesus within this very familiar passage of Scripture proposes a series of tests that need to be applied. In this sermon he is seeking to unmask counterfeit religion.

Matt. 5:3-12. Are very familiar beatitudes. The beatitudes focus on attitudes. Those in Christ’s kingdom are various things: They are poor in spirit, they are mournful, they are gentle, they hunger and thirst after righteousness, they are merciful, they are pure in heart, they are peacemakers. Having the right attitudes is a mark of true salvation. When the Pharisees of that day looked at their lives they were proud, boastful, self sufficient, and self centered. Whatever salvation they thought they had did not pass the TEST OF ATTITUDE.

Matt. 5:13-16. Jesus communicates the importance of influence as a test of our faith. Those with genuine and true faith are the salt and light of this world. Rather than being an evil influence or a non-factor those with true and genuine faith will be a positive influence. We could call this the TEST OF INFLUENCE.

Matt. 5:17-20. Jesus talks about true salvation being marked by a commitment to the word of God. In other words, true salvation can be tested by the matter of obedience to the Law of God. In this regard the Jewish people to whom Christ was speaking for the most part came up short. They would submit to the laws of men but would woefully come up short when it came to the laws of God. We could call this the TEST OF OBEDIENCE.

Matt. 5:21-48. It talks about the importance of the heart. We could call this the TEST OF HEART RIGHTEOUSNESS. On the outside you may do this but on the inside you do that. You say this but on the inside it is not the case at all.

Matt. 6:1-18. Jesus speaks about genuine faith that can be seen in a right worship. We could call this the RIGHT WORSHIP TEST. Jesus in these verses spoke about how people should pray, and now they should give, and how they should fast. And we could continue to go through this sermon and see other tests.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Not only do we see large portions of Scripture within certain books set aside to provide us with certain tests of living or genuine faith but entire books. First John is an example of such a book. It is filled with specific tests of genuine faith from the very first chapter of the book to the very last chapter of the book.

1 John 1:6-10, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; (7) but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. (8) If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” (9) If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His Word is not in us.”

1 John 2:3-4, “And by this we know that we have come to know Him, if we keep His commandments. (4) The one who says, “I have come to know Him, “ and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him:”

1 John 2:5 “But whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him.”

1 John 2:9 “The one who says he is in the light and yet hates his brother is in the darkness until now.”

1 John 2:15 “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him.”

1 John 2:29 “If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him.”

1 John 3:6 “No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him.”

1 John 3:9 “No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in Him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.”

1 John 3:14 “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren, he who does not love abides in death.”

And this goes on and on and on throughout the book. James is very similar to 1 John in this regard. It is filled with various tests of genuine or living faith. In fact we will be able to outline the entire book around these certain tests.

Certainly the world is committed to the testing of things that have value in the world such as silver, gold and precious stones. We, the church must be even more committed to the testing of living or genuine faith because the consequences are much more far reaching than simply the loss of money.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Will there actually be people who think that they possess genuine living saving faith that in fact do not? Or in other words, are there people who think they are going to heaven who in fact are not? And the answer is, of course, yes! In **Matt. 7:21-23**, “**Not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. (22) Many will say to Me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?’ (23) And then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.”**

In choosing to study the book of James we will, as a congregation, have the opportunity to make sure that we are not one of these. It will be a very exciting day for me personally, and I am sure for you also, when we meet Jesus face to face, we will all be there and accounted for.

Now with this in mind, let us begin to look at this epistle. Let us look at the very first verse as we continue to lay the framework for a study of this epistle. “**James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.**” The very first question that we have to address in the study of this epistle is exactly who is James? We have four different choices.

Two of these choices are very obscure.

James the Son of Alphaeus He was one of the twelve original disciples of Jesus. And we find his name mentioned anytime the list of Christ’s twelve disciples are mentioned in the scriptures. But, apart from his name appearing in the list of disciples, there is no mention of him in the Scriptures.

James the father of Judas. Among Jesus' disciples there were two disciples named Judas. One of course was Judas Iscariot and the other Judas is identified as being the son of James..... Neither of these obscure individuals, either James the Son of Alphaeus or James the father of Judas are considered by anyone to be a possibility for having written this epistle.

But there are two more choices that are much more prominent.

Just as there were two Judas’s included in Christ’s original twelve disciples there were also two James’s. There was James the Son of Alphaeus which we have already mentioned but there was also James the son of Zebedee whose older brother was the apostle John. These two brothers we know as the “Sons of Thunder.” They were volatile men. They were men of great excitement and intensity. James and John were more than just two of the twelve. They were in the inner circle of three. They were fishermen when Jesus first called them to be his disciples in **Mt. 4:17-22**. He told them that he would make them fishers of men. And Christ was faithful in fulfilling that promise to them. Any time in the biblical record that James is mentioned he is always mentioned in conjunction with his brother John, except once. The one exception is found in **Acts 12:2** where we are told about his execution at the hands of Herod Agrippa I.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

The timing of his death is very important in determining who wrote the epistle of James. His death most likely occurred in AD 44. There is no evidence that by that date he had attained a special position of leadership among Jewish Christians that would justify this letter. He is not prominent in the first twelve chapters of Acts and is always identified in terms of his father or his famous brother, John. That he was the author of this epistle is very improbable. If not, James the brother of John, then who wrote this letter?

The best choice appears to be James the brother of Jesus (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3; Acts 1:13; 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 2:9,12). He is a very prominent figure in the early church. When our Lord Jesus came into this world, Mary, his mother, was a virgin. But, after the birth of Jesus, she went on to bear other children. And the oldest of those that were born was James.

CONCLUSION

The epistle of James was written so that the believing community might be able to test or examine their faith. And the person who wrote this particular epistle was the brother of Jesus.

James the brother of Jesus knew Jesus very well. He had grown up with him. He knew a lot more about Jesus than any of Christ's disciples in certain specific ways. James knew all about Jesus but he truly did not know him. James wanted people not to simply have a superficial understanding of Jesus or uneventful encounter with Him but a true heart-wrenching, life-changing experience.

Certainly we can know then why he would choose to write this epistle and outline for us the tests of living, genuine faith. If this is not clear to us this weekend, it will be by next week when we take a much closer look at this wonderful man of God.