

Faith Works

Introduction to James

January 14, 2014

Memory Verse: James 1:19 – ¹⁹My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry,

“If you could visit anyplace in the world, where would it be?” I never have a problem answering that question. I blurt out instantly, “The Holy Land!” Israel. To walk where Jesus walked would be a dream come true. I can imagine myself being overcome with emotion on the Mount of Olives...at Golgotha...in the garden tomb. However, that’s not happening anytime soon...maybe ever.

But consider this. What if we could talk with someone who walked with Jesus – someone who knew him better than almost anyone? That is, I believe, the privilege we have with this letter written by James, the *brother* of Jesus. He grew up with Jesus. They played and worked together, and James grew to call Jesus, “Lord.” In fact, James’s letter is more dependent on the teachings of Jesus than any other New Testament book. We may not be able to walk where Jesus walked, but through James we can walk with one who walked with Jesus. That’s pretty exciting, isn’t it?

A word of fair warning though: you will be convicted by this letter. You will be challenged by it. At one point in studying it, I thought, “I think I should have named this study *Not for the Faint of Heart...or Faith!*” Having said that, I think the challenge is good for us, and I believe we will find James to be among the most practical, applicable books of the Bible.

The questions that follow (to be discussed on the first week of the study) will familiarize you with both the format of the study as well as some of the themes of James. May God bless to your understanding all that His Word has for you in this wonderful letter of James.

Are you ready? Let’s dig in!

DAY ONE

1. If you were in a study last semester, what was your most important take-away from that study?
2. What are you hoping to receive from this study?
3. How can your Bible study small group, small group leader, and teacher support you in this endeavor?
4. What prior information, if any, do you have about the book of James?

DAY TWO

There are differing opinions on the identity of the author of the book of James. While it is possible that the author's identity cannot be made with absolute certainty, I do believe there is a highly probable answer to the question, "Who was James?" I'd like to give you a little taste of the difficulty that is faced in deciding, however.

Read Acts 1:12-13 and Matthew 13:53-55.

5. How do these verses highlight the difficulty in deciding which James wrote the letter?

For reasons we will discuss in class, I believe James, the brother of Jesus, wrote the book of James. He was a prominent leader in the early church. The only other James who was

significant enough to write a letter of this magnitude was James the Apostle, a son of Zebedee, and the brother of the Apostle John. Why don't I think he wrote the book? The Apostle James was martyred very early in the history of the church – too early to have been the author of James. While James the brother of Jesus was not one of the original disciples, there is good evidence both within and outside the New Testament that he, along with Paul, was considered an Apostle in the early church.

6. Read the following verses. What do they tell you about James, the brother of Jesus?

- John 7:1-5 –
- Acts 15:12-21 –
- 1 Corinthians 15:7, 8 –
- Galatians 1:18-19; 2:1, 9-10 –

IN CASE YOU WANT TO KNOW

James is probably the most practical book of the New Testament; it is filled with direct commands. In fact, imperative verbs (commands) appear with greater frequency in James than in any other New Testament letter.

DAY THREE

7. What, to you, is the most important attribute of God? Why?

8. How would you define wisdom? Why is it important?

How does a person obtain wisdom?

9. How would you contrast our culture's idea of wisdom with biblical wisdom?

10. How would you describe God's law?

What is its purpose in a Christian's life?

DAY FOUR

In one of the most well-known verses in James, he proclaims, "Faith without works is dead" (2:17).

11. What is the relationship between faith and works (meaning the good deeds we are commanded to do)?

James has a lot to say about suffering, as well as our attitude as we face suffering. One concern in James is that trials can lead to wavering faith which opens the door to temptation.

12. Do you believe there can be purpose in suffering? If so, what purpose(s) might there be in suffering?

13. What tends to be your attitude when you go through trials or difficult times?

We can learn a lot about how NOT to respond to trials and adversity from the wandering Israelites. They had a default response to difficulty.

Read Exodus 14:10-12; 15:22-24; 16:1-3, 6-8.

14. How did the Israelites respond to adversity?

What can you learn from this?

DAY FIVE

15. How would you define sin?

What are the sources of sin? From where does it originate?

James understands the struggle each one of us faces with sin. It is a major theme in his letter. The Apostle Paul understood the struggle too.

Read Romans 7:21-24 (written by Paul)

16. Have you experienced this struggle in your own life? How would you describe it?

17. James refers a number of times to Jesus as “Lord.” What does it mean to say that Jesus is Lord?

How does that truth work itself out in your own life?

James has some harsh words for those who are rich. In James’ day, ninety percent of the population lived below what we call the poverty level. What we know as “the middle class” was virtually non-existent. In pointed fashion, James tells “those who are rich” to care for those who live in the margins of society – particularly widows and orphans. James envisions the church as a community that meets the physical needs of its members, and where no factions based on wealth exist.

18. Do you see this ethic displayed in the American church? If so, in what ways? If not, what changes do you think need to be made?

19. How can your small group be praying for you this week?

