

Imagine if **your big brother** was Jesus. And your big brother began to preach, and crowds started to flock to him.... And he started saying **crazy** things – things that only a prophet, or someone who had a god-complex would say....

How would you feel? What would you do???? Would you be a bit embarrassed? Would you try to get him to see reason????

Well, Jesus' family, reckoned He was crazyⁱ. John tells us that His brothers didn't even believe in Himⁱⁱ. And Mark tells us, they tried to hold him back, by forceⁱⁱⁱ....

Jesus **had** brothers and sisters, you know (at least ½ brothers and ½ sisters)... And one of these brothers – most probably the eldest of his little brothers – was named James... Others were Jude (or Judas), Joses (or Joseph) and Simon.

And we don't know when **James became** a believer – we don't know when he became a Christian... During Jesus' ministry, James was **never** counted among the 12 apostles. (2 **other** James' were [James the son of Zebedee and James the son of Alphaeus], it was a common name) but never James the son of Joseph...

As far as we know, he wasn't there when Jesus was crucified... But we **do** know that when Jesus was raised from the dead, His brother James, is one of those, to whom He appeared^{iv}. (I'd love to know what Jesus said to his brother when He came back from the dead,,,,, but of course, we **don't** know)

But by the time we get to Acts Chapter 12, James is recognised, as one of the Pillars of the New Testament church. Paul recognises him as an apostle^v. And as an apostle, he holds a great deal of authority in the church – James seems to be the go-to man – the one who people look to for answers – the leader – the Statesman.

And **this** James, the brother of Jesus, is the one who wrote the letter, that we've begun to study today. And as Jesus' brother, James doesn't elevate himself – he never claims any special status. No special family discount – He sees himself as a slave (our bible reading might have translated the word (δοῦλος) as “servant”, but a more accurate word would be “slave”. James sees himself as a slave of God, **and** a slave of the Lord Jesus Christ.

My, what a change that was for James. He used to think his brother was crazy – that He was the family embarrassment.... But when Jesus was raised from the dead, that all changed...

What does James think of his big brother now??? Well firstly, He is his master. He calls Jesus, “the Lord”... Now you tell me, to a Jew, who do they call “the Lord”???? God.

Let me read to you, what James wrote, from V5: ⁵ If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask **God**, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. ⁷ For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from **the**

Lord: Who's the Lord???? - God! What did James call Jesus??? "The Lord".

When Jesus was raised from the dead, James realised that his big brother, was exactly who He said He was... As a boy, James had shared a bedroom, with God. He'd played in the back yard, with God. He'd tried to restrain, God.... Jesus - is - God... The Father and the Son are one...

Of course the Jehovah Witnesses don't believe that, and so, to perpetuate their lie that Jesus is subordinate to God – to perpetuate the lie, that there is no trinity, they use 2 different words – They translate the one word "kurios" as "the Lord" when it's referring to Jesus, and they translate the exact same word "Kurios" as "Jehovah" when it refers to God.^{vi} (sometimes within the same sentence)

But James was very clear. Jesus is "the Lord". God is "the Lord". Therefore, Jesus is God. He says, "I am a slave of God. I am a slave of Jesus".

He also named Him, "Christ". James is the son of Joseph, but Jesus had a different dad – He is the Son of God. And so therefore, Jesus is "the Christ" – He's the one, Israel had been waiting for...

What an incredible statement, for a man to make about his brother. A statement, which if you said it about your brother, it would be an utter lie. But James could say it about **his** brother, and it was absolutely true.

1 James, a [slave] of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,

To the twelve tribes in the Dispersion:
Greetings.

We don't have to delve too deeply, into that salutation. At this stage, the church was largely Jewish. The mission to the Gentiles was either just beginning, or hadn't yet begun, and the contents of this letter, are clearly written to Jewish Christians, and James refers to them as **the twelve tribes in the Dispersion**.

And to them, he says "Greetings"...

Often, when people turn up at my place, I'll welcome them with "Greetings", and I think some folk reckon I'm from outer-space (greetings, earthling), and I suspect, my wife included, feel it's all a bit weird.

But the word translated as "greetings" is *χαίρειν*. (chairein), and it means "joy". It's a greeting of joy. In the Greek, 2 words later, he says *χαρὰν* (charan), basically the same word ,
² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,

Alright, so "Greetings." "Joyful Greetings". **² Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds,**

It's right for Christians to say to one another "Greetings"... It's expressing the joy we have... It's a reminder of the joy we should have... Greetings.

Now, at this point, I reckon it's important for us to get a bit of a big picture view of this letter. We're going to be working through James, in some detail, over the next few months, but right now at the beginning, let's just take a moment, to have a bit of an overview.

The book of James, **has** been described as "the Proverbs of the New Testament"... A fair bit of it, just seems to jump instantly from one topic to the next. It might have a sentence or two of advice on one topic, and then, nearly straight away, it's on to another topic entirely...

But it's not really, that similar to Proverbs....

If I was to use one word, to sum up the drive of this letter, I would use the word "non-passivity"^{vii}.... To be passive, means you have something done to you, and you take little, or no part in it. To be **non**-passive, means you actively play a role in it.

Let me give you an example: You're a bit like me, and you know you need to lose some weight. The passive way to lose weight, is to go to a doctor, and he'll do liposuction on you – he shoves the tube up under you skin, and he sucks all the fat out. (sllllppp)... The non-passive way to lose weight, is to do

more exercise and eat less. (Now, that's an imperfect example / comparison for passive / non-passive Christianity, but it lets you know what the word means)

Some Christians have a very passive faith – that is, “God’s done everything. I don’t have to do anything”. Where as James, is saying “That sort of faith – a passive faith – is a misunderstanding of Christ. That kind of faith is dead; it’s barren; and it’ll do you no good on the day of judgment.”

Because, the Christian life, is a very **active** life, of living; and loving; and serving; and giving; and trusting; and enduring;..... It’s a faith of commitment, which holds fast; it’s a praying faith; it’s a **doing** faith..... It is a **non-passive** faith.

And James is quite blunt – believing, without doing, is not a faith that will save us. Faith, without works, is dead.

Now, that might be different to what you believe, but that’s what the Scripture says. And of course, in the reformation, we have the whole argument of grace Vs. works. And we’ll talk about that more in more detail, in a few weeks, when we get to that topic in James...

But just for now, I’ll just say this (and remember, this is only an introduction – this isn’t a complete statement on what James says):

The Christian doctrine of salvation and justification – what we believe, is we are saved by faith alone. Alright, it’s **not** what we do, that saves us. If you could live a completely sinless life, well you don’t need to be saved... The trouble is, of

course, none of us can – and so we're all in quite a pickle, aren't we.... And Jesus died, to save us from that predicament....

Jesus paid the penalty for our sin. And I'm not going to explain this to you again now. If you don't understand grace – if you don't understand that to be saved, we repent of our sin, believe in Jesus, and follow him... - if you don't know what you have to do to be saved, please come and talk to me about it, and I'll explain it to you. Becoming a Christian is the most critical thing that any of us can ever do...

But, some people criticise James, because he doesn't explain all of this in his letter. He doesn't talk about the cross. He doesn't explain some of the basic Christian doctrines. But you see, he doesn't **need** to. He's writing to Christians – they already know it... And yet, people like the reformer, Martin Luther, criticise James. Luther said that he '*mangles the Scriptures and thereby opposes Paul and all Scripture*' (LW 35:397), and he characterized the letter as '*an epistle of straw*' (LW 35:362)^{viii},... Now, that's a big call, and what a silly thing to say. James had the authority of an Apostle. And he reckoned that he opposed Paul, and therefore he opposed Scripture. And yet, in the Scriptures, Paul used to defer to James. Paul looked to **James** for authority^{ix})... and Luther **said** this, because James didn't talk about some of the great Christian doctrines, particularly some of the doctrines that were reinvigorated, during the reformation – doctrines that Luther held so dear (and so do we)....

But you see, James didn't need to. He didn't need to go over that ground again. James wasn't telling us how to find initial salvation – he was teaching us that Christianity, is not a

passive religion – he’s teaching us about, how when we **are** a Christian, how to **live as** a Christian.

When James looked around him, he saw a people who **believed** in Jesus, but weren’t **following** Jesus – a people who were so fixated on “faith alone”, that they didn’t **act** in faith. And faith isn’t faith at all, unless it’s accompanied by actions. Faith isn’t faith at all, unless it moves us, to obey the commandments of God.

And so, the purpose of this letter, is not to inform, but *to command, exhort, and encourage*^x. There are more imperatives in the book of James, than in any other New Testament book... Do you know what an “imperative” is? An imperative is a command – It’s a statement that leaves no room for quibbling... “You **must** do this”.... – “it’s imperative that you do”

James, was concerned, that the world was getting into the church. These so-called Christians, **said** they believed, but they lived just like the rest of the world around them...

You know, as I was preparing this message, I read the entire book of James, several times. In fact, I’d encourage you to go home and read it – it’s quite a short book (about 15min). And as I read it, I realised just how much James drew from the teachings of Jesus, in what he said. And it caused me to consider again, the place of the Gospels – the place of the teachings of Jesus....

At Bush Disciples – I consider us, to be an evangelical church... The trouble is, for more and more evangelicals

today, they simply see the teachings of Jesus, and the commandments of Jesus, as an unachievable mark, which helps us to realise that we need to be saved.....

Well, very clearly, in the teachings of James, **and** the teachings of Jesus, the purpose is much greater than that. Imagine if, when Jesus preached the sermon on the mount, the disciples responded by saying, “Well thank goodness, that because we believe in you, we don’t have to actually do that – because we have faith...” ... How wrong would that be???

You see, as we work our way through James, we’re going to see his discussion on wisdom. To James, Wisdom is almost a picture of the Holy Spirit. But as he describes wisdom, you soon see that Godly wisdom leads to obedience and righteousness, and good works, where as worldly wisdom, does not. And I’m reminded that, right at the end of the Sermon on the mount, Jesus said ^{Matthew 7:24} **“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.
26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.**

Jesus has every expectation, that those who are saved, (once they are saved), they will strive to follow Jesus in His paths of righteousness. And that’s what James highlights: Once we **are** saved, this therefore, is how we should live. And the fact that it’s phrased in imperatives (you must do this), means that it actually requires some effort on **our** part. Now that doesn’t mean, that we will perfectly achieve it (and James says that).

And so James preaches “Grace” for us in our failures... But he warns against passivity.

Yes, as we live as disciples of Jesus, sanctification means that the Holy Spirit is changing us to become more and more like Jesus. But James will constantly challenge us, that to live as disciples of Jesus – is **not** a passive experience.

Friends, I want to issue a challenge to you today:

As we read, and study, this book of James, you may realise, that what James says, is at ‘odds’ with what **some** branches of reformed theology teach. And the challenge I want to issue to you today, is “Do not downplay, what James says.” “Don’t downplay it – don’t try and explain away, these Apostolic Scriptures, to try and make it fit your theology.” Because that’s exactly the wrong way, to study God’s word.

We should allow the Scriptures, to shape what we believe about God and salvation... We should **never** let what we believe about God, shape how we interpret the Scriptures.

And so my challenge is this: Pray, “Holy Spirit, give me understanding of your word. I empty myself of teaching of men. I repent of trying to make You fit **my** picture of You. Reveal to me Your truth, and all of its uncomfortable challenges and demands that you may place upon my life. Free me from worldly wisdom, and fill me with Godly wisdom.

That’s where it begins.

Well, we didn't get very far today. That's just a bit of an introduction.

Next week, we'll probably have those same 8 verses again, and we'll begin studying, how the Lord commands us to live out our faith – in a **non-passive** way.

Questions?

ⁱ Mark 3: ²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

ⁱⁱ John 7:5 (ESV) ⁵ For not even his brothers believed in him.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mark 3: ²⁰ Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind."

^{iv} 1 Corinthians 15:7 (ESV) ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

^v Galatians 1:19 (ESV) ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.

^{vi} New World Translation (JW) James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes that are scattered about: Greetings! ² Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you meet with various trials, ³ knowing as you do that this tested quality of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ But let endurance complete its work, so that you may be complete and sound in all respects, not lacking in anything. ⁵ So if any one of you is lacking in wisdom, let him keep asking God, for he gives generously to all and without reproaching, and it will be given him. ⁶ But let him keep asking in faith, not doubting at all, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven by the wind and blown about. ⁷ In fact, that man should not expect to receive anything from Jehovah

^{vii} *"We know also that already during Paul's ministry his preaching on justification by faith was being misunderstood (cf. Rom. 3:5–8). It is not at all improbable, then, that some Christians who had been exposed to Paul's preaching may have—intentionally or not—perverted Paul's doctrine into an excuse for spiritual passivity"*. In, Moo, D.J., 1985.

James: An Introduction and Commentary, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

^{viii} Moo, D.J., 1985. *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

^{ix} Acts 15:2

^x 4. The nature of the letter, in Moo, D.J., 1985. *James: An Introduction and Commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.