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GETTING SET FOR A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE BOOK
OF JAMES

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF JAMES
JAMES 1:1
NUMBER 2

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JAMES 1:1 "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting."

A number of books in the Bible are addressed to the "Jews scattered." James, 1st and 2nd Peter and Hebrews are all addressed to the Jews. The approximate date of the Book of James is between 45 and 50 A.D. It is one of the earliest of the epistles and a very practical one. Martin Luther was so possessed with the idea of "Justification by faith" he just never could get the meaning of this book. He didn't even think it should have been included in the Canon of Scripture.

No Contradictions

There are no contradictions in God's word. Part of the Bible does not say justification is by faith and part of it that justification is by works. Justification is by faith and faith alone. We will discover as we go along that James is simply looking at justification from a different perspective. Then we will have to remember that something has been lost in the translation, and we will try to clear this up as we move through James.

Don't Misquote Scripture

In the second verse of this first chapter we will come to the phrase "Count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations." When you are bleeding and hurting and feel downhearted and sad, some little dainty thing comes tripping along and says in a high shrill voice, "Count it all joy, friend." Now they are not hurting and you are hurting. Your reaction is to hit them over the head. Usually the one who quotes that scripture rather glibly isn't hurting and he always quotes it to someone who is hurting. So quite obviously they are misapplying scripture for your situation. They will also quote that passage from James which says, "Confess your faults one to another" and they use it as though it were in conflict with the scripture which tells us to confess to God and to God alone.

Then someone now and then with wide-eyed excitement runs around anointing people with oil in order to heal them and they do it on the authority of the Book of James. Now you remember this--When you need medicine, anointing with oil won't do you any good. Confessing your sins to the congregation won't help you and it won't help them. Buckmanism and The Oxford Group and Moral Rearmament and other groups have followed this method in the past and it just brought confusion and disaster to a lot of misinformed people. The real message of James is therefore lost to many people and they never do understand the real impact of this book.

A Message In The Mind Of Christ

Let me remind you that the message of this book of James was in the mind of Christ in eternity past and finally the time had come for the Holy Spirit to reveal that message. This book was written from Jerusalem, and already the storm clouds were beginning to gather for the Jews over that city. The destruction of Jerusalem was clear and certain. Peter and Paul moved out of Jerusalem and left the leadership of the Jerusalem church to James.

A Jewish Epistle

This is a Jewish epistle in every sense of the word. It lays emphasis on Jewish sins, like legalism and pride and over-confidence and sins of the tongue. This book also places a great emphasis on nature. We will see many analogies in this book to nature.

54 Imperative Moods

Almost every line of this book has an imperative mood in it. The imperative mood is a direct command. James wrote a positive message and it means "This is not optional. You are to do these things and it is a command from God."

There are two very dominant ideas in James, and they are application and production. This epistle tells you how to apply your knowledge of the Word of God to every day living. The first part of this epistle is on faith. The Book of Romans says that you are justified by faith, because Romans is discussing salvation. James says that you are justified by works, because James is discussing the vindication of the Christian in the eyes of the unbeliever. Doctrine on the inside of you can't be seen, and that is what Romans discusses. But doctrine in action can be seen on the outside, in your production, and that's what James is discussing. Inside you is faith in Jesus Christ. You have been justified by this inner faith. But a person standing on the outside looking in at the believer can't see that justification by faith which is internal. That justification is real, the person is really saved, but it is on the inside and can't be observed. God sees it, but the average person looking at the individual can't see it.

Salvation In A Second

Salvation takes place in a second of time.

GALATIANS 2:16 "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

But there is no neon sign you can press and out jumps a big sign for all to read, "I'm saved. I have been justified by faith." There is no sign that appears on your forehead for all to see--"Take notice--I'm saved." Faith in Christ and regeneration is on the inside and can't be seen externally.

Let me remind you not to set up legalistic standards and say, "Now you can't do that and be a Christian." Remember that there are baby Christians and adolescent Christians and mature Christians. Even spiritual Christians will commit sins that will sometimes shock you. David did. David was a mature Christian with an edification complex in his soul, but he sinned when he walked into "operation Bathsheba." He committed murder and adultery and yet he was a born again man when he did it. Now it wasn't right. God didn't approve of it and David was punished terribly. He had to pay for that sin and he had to pay bitterly. So quite often what you see on the outside, what you see in conduct does not actually determine what is on the inside. James, in this very practical book, deals with the overt side of things. James, in substance is saying this: "There are some norms and standards, and if you become oriented to grace there is a certain way you will conduct yourself." So man looks on the outside but God always looks on the inside.

Illustration

Take the case of the short-sighted usher. In comes a man neatly dressed with polish and class, a ring on his finger and evidence of real wealth. The usher smiles from ear to ear, bows to him and shows him to the very best seat in the house. Next comes in a poor man, shabbily dressed and evidence of real poverty and hardship. The short-sighted usher gives him no handshake, no smile, and shoves him down in the worst seat in the house. Is that any way for a Christian usher to act?

Now that is the problem James is going to confront in this book. Now if a man is legalistic and self-righteous and looking only for mere appearances, then he should react like the short-sighted usher. You recall this is exactly what Samuel did when he was looking for a king to replace Saul. Samuel went to the house of Jesse, and when superficial Jesse trotted out all his good looking boys, Samuel fell for the first one he saw. But God said to Samuel, "No, I have not chosen any of these. Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the mind and the soul."

1 SAMUEL 16:6-7 "And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him. But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

Look At These Specific Cases

James has some very amazing things to say. James actually says that Abraham was justified by works. Well, I thought for many years that Abraham was justified by faith.

GENESIS 15:6 "And he believed in the Lord; and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Now that verse says that Abraham was justified by faith. But in James 2:21 we read that Abraham was justified by works. JAMES 2:21 "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?" Is this a contradiction in the Bible? Not at all. You have to read the last part of that verse of James 2:21 in order to understand what James was talking about. James said that Abraham was justified by works "when he offered up Isaac." Now that occurred a half century after Abraham was saved by faith in Christ. The world couldn't see that act down in Abraham's heart when he was converted. But the offering up Isaac was an overt act which the world could see. Behind that overt act was an inner faith, an inner doctrine. When your edification complex goes into action, then you have justification by works. In other words, your work proves the genuineness of your inner decision.

When a man uses his faith it results in overt acts. This is the theme of the Book of James. In the second chapter of James, Rahab the prostitute is used as an illustration. When she heard about what God had done down in Egypt in setting the people free, she believed in Christ and became a Christian. Then when the spies came into the land, she hid them and protected them.

JAMES 2:25 "Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?"

This is when she was justified by works, when she hid the spies. Now her justification by faith had come quite some time before that. Faith justification always comes before works justification. Her overt act in hiding the spies was an evidence to the outside world that she had been justified. Here her edification complex was showing. Rahab turned out to be the grandmother of David and when Jericho was destroyed, Rahab and her household were saved. She became the wife of Salmon, one of those spies who had been hidden on her roof. In this way Rahab moved into the royal line. Salmon was of the Tribe of Judah and from this line came Christ. James is a very fascinating epistle but you must understand these things I have just explained in order to understand James. Another good title for this book might be "Look out! Your Edification Complex Is Showing."

Emotional Emphasis

There are certain passages in this book where the emotional sins come out. James gives a very vivid picture of the emotional revolt of the soul when he describes the sins of the tongue in Chapter 3. James lashes out at the people who have these sins. The Book of James says, "What, after all is really on the inside of you?" He shows that one's attitude toward doctrine determines the way a person goes. One is either headed toward an emotional revolt in the soul, or one is headed toward spiritual maturity and an edification complex in the soul. Which way are you going now? James really says this-"Believer, what is really inside of you?" Now that's the big question this book asks. If you live long enough in the Christian life, you are going to reveal what is actually on the inside. What you really are comes out sooner or later. Every day we are really deciding for or against Bible doctrine. So James explores the exciting life that is before you as a Christian. James says, "So you are a Christian? Very well, get up and get to work and show the unsaved man what you are really like as a believer." That's what Abraham did when he placed Isaac on the altar. That's what Rahab did when she hid the spies.

JAMES 1:1 "James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting." This is the salutation to this book. In verses 2-15 we have the edification complex on "How to show greatness." Then in verses 16-27 "How grace operated in the soul" or "The road to greatness." God has designed the Christian life so anyone can be great according to divine standards. Moses was both historically great and spiritually great, possibly more so than any man in the Old Testament. God sets the standard for greatness and provides the means whereby one may be great. So in this book we will study these two sides of greatness.

Let's Identify James Under Five Points

1. James was the Lord's half-brother.

MATTHEW 13:55 "Is not this the carpenter's son? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?"

Here we have the names of the Children of Mary and Joseph after the birth of Jesus. After the virgin birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary had many children by natural means. The sisters are not named but we know there was at least two, for it says sisters.

2. James was not a believer during the public ministry of Jesus. JOHN 7:5 "For neither did his brethren believe in him."
3. However, James did become a believer after the resurrection. ACTS 12:17 "But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place."

ACTS 15:13 "And after they had held their peace, James answered saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:"

ACTS 21:18 "And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present."

GALATIANS 1:19 "But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother."

GALATIANS 2:2 "And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain."

4. James was not a name dropper. He didn't call himself "The half brother of Jesus." James was not necessarily the strongest leader. But he did not try to be famous by claiming to be related to Jesus.
5. The word "doulos" is used here in James and it means a slave. He calls himself "The slave of God." That is a genitive of possession. The word "And" is from "Kai" and it means that he is equally a slave of Jesus Christ. He puts Jesus Christ on an even footing with God and says that he is the slave of both God the Father and Jesus the Son. He never calls himself the half brother of Jesus. He isn't a name dropper. James grew up with Jesus, but that didn't cause him to be a believer. It was later when he heard his teachings and came to understand the meaning of the cross and the resurrection, that he became a believer.

Look At These Principles

1. Physical birth gave James no spiritual or physical advantage. You are not great because of your family tree. James was a member of a royal family, a descendant of David. He had in his veins the blood of both Solomon and Nathan. He was an aristocrat by birth.
2. There are no assets in physical birth whereby man can gain the approbation of God. There is no such thing as natural ability. There is such a thing as God-given ability. We use the talents God has given us, but God gets all the credit. Don't take credit for using the gifts that God has given you.
3. God's grace provided for everything and excludes physical ability and physical assets.

4. Neither James, nor his mother Mary nor his father Joseph were saved by their physical relationship with Christ. They were all saved just like we were saved--by faith in Christ.

This book is addressed to the twelve tribes of Jews scattered out over the world. James realized that Jerusalem was going to be destroyed and he wanted the Jews to have this message. "Which are scattered" is the dative of advantage. It was to their advantage to be scattered so they could spread the gospel message out to others.

The word "greeting" is from "chairo" and it means inner happiness. The Jews were scattered but they were to have inner happiness, they were to "KEEP ON REJOICING!"