

James: Introduction (James 1:1)

Phil Ayres, LifePoint Christian Church

March 13, 2011

Now here is the deal we are going to start this new series in the book of James, and it is going to go for probably 10 to 12 weeks. We are going to kind of do what we did in Hebrews, we are going to track through it. I just don't think it will take as long as Hebrews, because James is a shorter book. We are basically going to work our way through it. What I have is four challenges for you guys, as we do this new series. Here are the four challenges:

Number 1) I want to encourage you guys to come as often as possible, when we are doing this series. Here is the reason why...as we go through the book of James each message is sort of going to build on the next, so the effect is cumulative. If you only come every five or six weeks you are going to miss a lot of what is going on and you might be in the dark a little bit. Now, those message will be online, you can listen to them, you can listen to them online. I just want to encourage you to come as often as you can, if you want to get as much as you can out of this series.

Number 2) Bring your Bible every week. We have Bibles that you can use, but I would encourage you to bring your Bible, that way as you open to the book of James you can take some little notes, make some reference notes, things like that; and you have your Bible.

Number 3) This is probably the hardest one. I want you to read the book of James each week, for the first four weeks of this series. Now that is not that hard, because James is only five chapters. So here is how you do it...Monday you read Chapter 1, Tuesday you read Chapter 2, Wednesday you read Chapter 3, Thursday read 4, Friday you can read 5. Now, if you missed one of those then you have the whole weekend to make it up. What will happen, as you start working through this, is you read it every single day, one of those chapters, and you will really start to understand it. That way when you come here, and I get to do some teaching you will have some ideas already about what God has been speaking to you about in the book. Okay!

Number 4) Take some notes because we are going to work our way right through this book. Starting at the beginning, going all the way to the end and this will be something you have about the book of James. I think what you are going to see is you are going to love the book of James. As a matter of fact how many people have read this, you like the book of James? Solid, solid stuff.

Alright, today's challenge is that we are sort of going to work on the background of the book. This message, I don't know if it is going to be the most inspirational, but I want to build a good foundation to get us through this book. So we are going to talk a little bit about why the book is written, who wrote the book, all kinds of things like that. That will help us understand the book of James. I think it is the five W's. This is a good idea for you when you are studying the Bible, whether it is the book of James, or elsewhere; to ask the five "W's". The who, the what, the

when, the where, the why. Some people do like to study their Bible just by going 'God bring me something interesting today, boom!' "I pounded them, and trampled them like mud in the streets." That is actually what I just put my finger on. If you do that, okay, I am sure God can work that way. What usually works better when you are learning to read the Bible is as you look at the passage ask those five "w's". Who wrote it. When did they write it. What is it, what kind of writing is it. Who were they writing it too, and why did they write it. What you are going to get now is a context for what the passage or the book, or the chapter means.

Context is important. I am going to give you an example, let's take the color green, alright, everybody say "green". Okay, green, we all know what green is. if you are talking to a painter and the painter says the paint is green, you go oh, he is talking about a color. He is talking about a shade. What happens if you are on a boat, a fishing boat, and somebody says 'you look kind of green.' They are really not talking about a color as much as they are talking about the fact that you look sick. You look ill. You have heard somebody say that right? How many of you have ever been in the military? What if you are on the battlefield and you get a whole bunch of new recruits come in. They say, oh, they are green. Are they talking about a color? Are they saying that they are sick? No, they are saying that they are inexperienced. They're green. What if you are trying to make a campfire and you throw some wood in there and it won't burn. Someone says, 'oh, that is because it is green.' Is it because it is inexperienced? Is it because it is sick? No, it's too new it hasn't dried out yet. So, you this, our language is kind of like that. That is part of the way the Bible is as well. That is just natural. You have to understand the context, otherwise you are going to be misguided. Actually, another good example, Sam was telling me this yesterday, for those of you that know sign language, well I will teach you some sign language this morning. Take your pinkies and make a cross on your forehead, like that, you just asked for Pepsi. Right? You just asked for Pepsi. However, this is also the sign for Italy. Okay, so in the wrong context you are going to be very confusing to people. How was Italy? Had some wonderful Pepsi there. You see how context. Context dictates what this means. It is really the same with what we are doing.

So, bare with me as we go through the five w's. Build the context for what this book is. Let's ask the first question. Who? Now, this should be easy. Who wrote the book of James? James, that is why it is called James. Right? Look with me at this first verse, it is helpful because he indicates in the very first verse. "James, a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations greeting." So the question is which James? There are a few James's. There are at least five potential authors for this book. Two stand out as the best candidates. Two James's. The first James is the brother of John. Now, if you were here last week we did a message on Biblical Leadership, and if you were remember there were was James and John. They were two of the disciples, they came to Jesus right before He was crucified and they asked Jesus if they could sit at His right hand and His left hand. So it is that James, mentioned in the book of Mark 10. Some people think he might have been the author because he was one of the disciples. There could be a problem with that. James was actually the first disciple that was martyred. He was executed. He was beheaded in 44 A.D. So the chances of him writing this book are not so good because of the timing. We will talk about that when we talk about the when. So, it's probably not him. The second candidate, and what most scholars believe wrote this book, or who wrote this book is James who is also a brother, but he was not the brother of John, he was the brother of Jesus. Now some of you just did like, what? Jesus had half-brothers? He did! The Bible is very clear, Jesus had brothers.

He had siblings, and James was his younger half-brother. Now let's just stop for a moment and think about that. How many of you have an older sibling that is close to perfect? Raise your hand....How many of you heard, 'why can't you be more like your brother?' 'Why can't you be more like your sister?' I was listening to this comedian yesterday, he was so funny. He was saying, poor James, I mean he wasn't "James Christ", he was just James. Everybody else had a WWJD bracelet on, he had a WWMBD bracelet on. "What Would My Brother Do?" It's interesting, if you want to understand the context, to understand that if Jesus brother wrote this book, does he have some kind of special insight into the scriptural teachings of Jesus. I think he does, I will show you that in a second. What you might realize is what a minute, I thought his brothers didn't believe in Him. As a matter of fact, there is a verse in the book of John 7:5, "Jesus brother said to Him, 'leave Galilee and go to Judea for even his own brothers did not believe in Him.'" That is where my mind gets kind of exploded. You grew up with Jesus and you didn't believe in Him? Didn't you see Him live a perfect life? It's possible that Jesus kept it fairly low key when He was younger. There is a whole other target we can go on here. There is a lot of people that really have good evidence of God in their lives, but they just reject Him because it is a pride thing. Maybe that is what it was. At some point for James he turned his life around. He gained faith in Jesus.

The book of Acts tells us, basically right after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the brothers and Mary met with the apostles for prayer. So we know that he turned his life around, and we know that this James was called James the Just. He became the head of the church at Jerusalem. Traditionally people believed that, that appointment was given to him by Peter and John. He was a very influential person in the beginning of Christianity. When I look at the book of James, I go, 'well, why didn't he just say James, the brother of Jesus, and specify it that way. Why didn't he say who he was. Probably for a couple of reason.... 1) I think there was an assumption that as James people would know who he was because he was an important person, but on another side, I think it almost proves that it could be James the brother of Jesus; because if somebody was trying to fake this book and make it seem like it was James the brother of Jesus. They would specify that he was the brother of Jesus. Do you get that logic? Some people are like no, we are going to move on.

Anyway, the teaching that James gives, and one of the reasons why I think that it is His brother, very closely resembles the teaching of Jesus in a lot of areas. I am going to give you one example, just to try to prove my point. In the book of Matthew Jesus says these words, listen carefully, "but I tell you do not swear at all, either by heaven for it is God's throne, or by earth for it is His footstool, or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the Great King. Don't swear by your head for you cannot make one hair either white or black. Simply let your yes be yes and your no be no." That is what Jesus said. Now listen to what James says in Chapter 5. "Above all my brothers do not swear, not by Heaven or by earth, or by anything else. Let your yes be yes and your no be no." There is a bunch of those. So you get this sense that whether James even believed in Jesus while they were growing up, or while they were adults he was listening to the messages that Jesus was teaching. That is one thing that makes this book very unique. So for us the application is this...why should it matter who wrote the book? Well, how will we hear the words knowing that they were written by somebody that was so close to the Savior of this earth. It changes things and helps us gain additional insight. So who? James.

What? What is James? What is it? It is a letter. It is an epistle. We call it a book, but essentially this was a letter. We know it is a letter for two reasons. Number one, it has a very typical greeting in the front of it that you would put in a letter. You would say, "I am writing to you", and here is who I am writing too, here is where I am writing it too. It's a letter. Secondly, this letter has a specific audience. Now books of the Bible that are written like prophetic books, or historical books don't have a specific audience, they are just written for greater mankind. This book has a very specific audience, he says it right there, "to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations."

The main point I want to make here, and this may be for some of you that are newer to Christianity or newer to the church, is the Bible is literally a book of books. We need to understand that. The word Bible comes from the Greek word Biblia which actually just means books. There are 39 books in the Old Testament, and there are 27 books in the New Testament, and these books are all different kinds of books. They are all different kinds of style of writing. There are historical books, prophetic books, poetic books, there are letters like this one. There are all kinds of different books, so knowing what kind of writing it is, is important because it will help us understand it's purpose. You don't approach every single book the same way, do you? You don't handle David McCullough's *1776*, which is a great book, the same way you would handle Douglas Adams *The Hitchhikers' Guide to the Galaxy*. They are different genres. So you have to approach them differently, the same here. Understanding that this is a letter means that in a way we are sort of ease dropping on the words that James had very specifically for some groups of people, and that gives us some insight.

So, the who is... James. The what is....a letter. When? When was this book written? Now this is important as well. There is a lot of people that believe the Bible is not inspired, and there are a lot of people that believe that the Bible is some sort of factitious book that man made up. They will say that this book was written all kinds of different places. We have very good evidence that this book was written between 47 and 49 A.D. We know that for a couple of reasons. #1 In the 50's and 60's A.D. there was a huge Jewish/Gentile controversy. Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians, basically everyone who was a Christian who is not a Jew, they were sort of fighting. Can you imagine that? Christians upset with one another. We read about that in the book of Acts, but there is no mention of it in the book of James. Which is interesting, because James served as the head of that council to help mediate that disagreement. So you would think that if this book was written after that there would probably something in that, but there is not. There is also in this book no mention of Paul and there is no mention of Paul's writings. Paul came much later, well I shouldn't say much later, he came somewhat later in Christianity. His missionary journeys happened later. So, they are not in this book either. Now given that this book is addressed to Jewish believers, specifically this is what helps us to get out application. Like, you are sitting there thinking, why do I care?

Why do I care when this book was written? Okay, if this book was written 47-49 A.D. this means that Christianity is barely 20 years old. Christianity is just done being a teenager. The Christians that were living at that time were baby Christians. They were just starting to understand what it meant to be Christ followers. So the stuff written in James is the stuff that Christian's need to learn first. It's practical. Very, very practical. This is the stuff that you would tell people once they became a Christian. You would tell them first, it is like stepping into a Kindergarten classroom, they wouldn't be teaching them Pythagorean theorem. I don't even

know what that is. I thought it was a desert or something. Pythagorean theorem, they wouldn't teach them that. What do they teach kindergarteners? They teach them $1+1=2$. $2+2=4$, $3+3=6$, all of that kind of stuff. That is the basics. It is not until later that they teach those complicated math theories. So, it is interesting to know that he is writing to a very young group of Christians. Christianity is sort of new. So here is the takeaway, for those of us that our new to Christ, this book is for us. You might be thinking, well Phil, I have been going to church since dirt, and I don't need to know all of that new stuff. Give me the Pythagorean theorem. This the biblical equivalent of what the Pythagorean theorem is. Don't you think that all of us could use a refresher.

You know my wife is a teacher, she is a fifth grade teacher, and she teaches math and science, she started doing something interesting recently. She was sending kids home with their homework and she was getting feedback from the parents, she was getting feedback from the parents saying, 'I don't remember how to do this stuff, I can't help my kids with their homework.' So she started doing these little videos that she would send to the parents to help them understand how to teach their kids their homework. The parents knew the stuff because at one point they were taught how to do division, and they were taught about exponents. They had forgotten. Well, the same thing here. This is a great opportunity for us to have a refresher and maybe for us to learn about it so we can then help the next generation of believers as well, with this practical information. So, it was written by James, it is a letter, it was written probably around 49 A.D.

Let's talk about the where. Where did this letter take place? Where was it addressed to? Well we have the answer there back in James. One, it was addressed to the twelve tribes that were scattered all over. James would have written this from Jerusalem. He spent his life in Jerusalem, like I said he was the head of the church there, and he wrote it to the twelve tribes scattered all over the nations. It is interesting because he is writing this to Jewish believers. Now this may come as a surprise to you, but Christianity at its core is a Jewish belief system. I mean at its core that is what it is. Maybe you could phrase it different ways, like Christianity is sort of a reformation of what Judaism is. God called Abraham, and he made the Israelites his people. He provided them with a law and a sacrificial system. It wasn't until Jesus came along and fulfilled that sacrificial system on our behalf that we have Christianity. Christianity didn't just sort of appear out of somebody's mind. That is important because there are religions that basically just appeared out of somebody's mind. They just made them up out of nowhere. Christianity is not like that. It has a history and it started with the Jews.

It actually says in the book of Acts that the first Christians met in the temple. They met in the temple at first and then eventually homes. It is not until Jesus resurrection that He gives them the great commission. In Acts 1 he says, "Go to Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth." So James is writing to these twelve tribes that are now scattered. Let me ask you this, where is Orlando in relation to Jerusalem? It's at the ends of the earth. Here we are. So the reality is this, this letter, though addressed to the twelve tribes, is just as much for us as it is for them. Understanding more about Jewish background, understanding more about their beliefs, understanding more about their customs are going to help us know what the letter meant to them, and then we can make the applications to us. So we know the who, James. Most likely the brother of Jesus. We know the what, it was a letter, it was an epistle. We know the when,

47-49 A.D. Fairly early in the history of Christianity. We know the where, but the most important question is the why.

Why was this letter written? When you write a letter there is a purpose to the letter. Like, I want to encourage somebody so let me get some paper out and a pen, and I am going to write them a letter. Probably an email nowadays. Or there is a problem somewhere. You hear of a problem somewhere and so you say, let me write a letter and see if I can help with this problem, or fix this problem. So, what is the purpose of James's letter? I believe the purpose is for maturity, and growth. Maturity and growth. It seems like in the 1st Century, just 20 years into Christianity, there were already churches filled with Christians who claimed to be followers of Christ, but in their actions seemed to be otherwise. There were churches filled with people who said "I am a Christian! I am a Christ follower!" When they left the temple court, or when they left the house church and went into the world, into the workplace they acted like they didn't know Christ.

In James one of his main points is in the 22nd verse of the 1st Chapter. He says this, "Don't merely listen to the word and deceive yourselves, do what it says. Be doers of the word, not just hearers only." So James is calling believers to be more than just passive listeners, but to be active believers. One of the things we will talk about is sort of crushing this myth that I believe has popped up in Christianity, and that is 'the longer you are a Christian the more mature you are a Christian.' That is not true. Christian maturity, if you want to use that word, spiritual maturity has nothing to do with the length of time that you have been a Christian. Spiritual maturity has everything to do with how you act as a Christian. You know this is true in other areas too. How many know a twelve year old that acts like a five year old? How many know a seventeen year old that acts like a twelve year old? or a 25 year old that acts like a 17 year old? or a forty year old that acts like a one year old? I mean time isn't exactly the best gauge for maturity. Spiritually that is also the case. What makes a person spiritually mature is their actions and their lives. So that is what this is about. I think it is interesting because I want to show you in the 5th verse of Chapter 1, it says this, "if any of you lacks wisdom you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you." Let me read that again, "if any of you lacks wisdom you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you."

What is wisdom? Wisdom is knowledge applied. I mean you can have the information, which I believe a lot of people have in the church today. I know where to find stuff in the Bible, I know who Jesus is. I know what He did for me. I know what the Old Testament covenant means. I know all of that. If I am not going to apply it that is not wisdom, that is just knowledge. Wisdom is saying, I know this and it changes my life. That is what he is trying to get at.

Here is the thing, I am going to ask you guys to close your eyes, we are going to close with a prayer. We are going to do just what he says here, because maybe in your spiritual life there are some blind spots where you are like you know what, I need to work on that. I need to apply that better. I need to speak better to my friends. I need to be more kind. I need to be more patient. I need to be more generous. I need to...whatever. I am just going to give you guys a moment, with your eyes closed to ask God for wisdom in those areas.