Introducing James

Lesson for Sunday, September 24, 2023

INTRODUCTION:

* What are some of the difficult questions about the Christian faith do we often have to wrestle with? *Allow for discussion…*
  + Example: Why do bad things happen to good people?
  + Example: How does what the Bible teaches mesh with science?
* A big question that many often wrestle with is: What is the relationship between faith and works?
  + How would you answer that question? *Allow for discussion but don’t look to correct anything…*
* The good news: We have an entire book of the Bible dedicated to this question. It is the book of James and today we begin our study through this highly practical book.
* Today we are going to introduce the book. Let’s begin by reading the very first verse (1:1).

BIBLE STUDY:

1. The Man James
   1. What do you know about the author of this book?
      1. *Allow for discussion to see what they know…*
      2. Tip: Bring some resources for the class to look through on their own to learn more about James.
   2. There is a lot to learn about the human author of this book. Let’s see what we can learn about James from the pages of Scripture itself.
   3. James was the half-brother of Jesus.
      1. See Matthew 13:55 & Mark 6:3
      2. Briefly discuss: What perspective should this fact alone give to James as he writes?
   4. James was an unbeliever for most of Jesus’s earthly life.
      1. See John 7:5 (interestingly this was prophesied about in Psalm 69:8)
   5. It appears that James became a believer after the resurrection.
      1. See 1 Corinthians 15:7 – notice that Paul lists James specifically
      2. By the ascension, James is now with that early group of believers (see Acts 1:14).
   6. James became the main leader in the early Jerusalem church.
      1. See Paul’s reference in Galatians 2:9
      2. Paul actually refers to James as an apostle in Galatians 1:19.
      3. James is recognized early in Acts 12:17 as a leader in Jerusalem.
      4. James presides over the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:13ff & is still leading in Acts 21:18-19.
   7. That is who the Bible says James was. Interestingly, that is not how James introduces himself in today’s text.
      1. He describes himself as “a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.”
      2. The word “servant” is *doulos* which means slave.
   8. James had come a long way since John 7:5! Henry Morris wrote, *“It is a fascinating testimony to God’s grace that James, who had been an unbelieving brother of Jesus, was chosen to write the first inspired book to believing Jews, and Paul, the chief persecutor of the early church, was chosen to write the first epistle to believing Gentiles.”* Amazing grace!
2. The Book of James
   1. Verse 1 tells us that James is writing to “the twelve tries which are scattered abroad.”
      1. This is a reference to the Jewish converts who had been scattered throughout the Roman Empire due to their persecution (see Acts 8:1).
      2. James was writing as a concerned pastor to his flock that had been spread out and needed encouragement and instruction.
   2. Historians tells us that the book of James was probably the earliest written epistle – even before Paul began writing (probably between 40-43 AD).
      1. The Christian faith was still very new and James recognized that these young Christian converts needed some written guidelines as they were growing in their new faith.
      2. James’s approach is more moral than it is theological. James is dealing with the nuts and bolts of basic Christian living.
   3. The theme verse is James 1:22 (read).
      1. Throughout the book, James will stress the necessity of good works as evidence of saving faith.
      2. At the same time, James if very clear that works themselves do not suffice for salvation.
3. The Reason for James
   1. There are two primary reasons to study this wonderful book of James.
   2. First, we need to examine the relationship between faith and works.
      1. James uses the word “faith” 14 times in just 5 chapters.
      2. He also provides 59 commands that we should obey.
      3. His point is that genuine faith acts. Or, as we refer to this series, FAITH WORKS.
      4. We live in a day where as soon as you talk about works someone will cry, “Legalism!”
      5. Many today will say that Christianity is not about doing this and doing that. James says, “Yes, it is!”
      6. We are not to just listen to the Word. We are to do it. If you don’t, your faith is dead.
   3. Second, we need to explore the impact of our faith on life in this world.
      1. James is very practical! He is teaching that what we believe ought to impact the way we behave!
      2. Our faith is intended to impact every aspect of life, which ought to inevitably impact the lives around us.

APPLICATION:

* Challenge your class to memorize one keystone verse from each chapter of James. If you learn these verses, you will understand the heart of James. The verse from chapter 1 should be a familiar one, James 1:22.
* Second, challenge your class to dive into the book of James. Encourage them to read it often and study it for themselves.