

**James – “Life after Faith”**  
**James 1:1**  
**“Instruction in an Introduction”**

**Outline:**

- 1. THE CHRISTIAN’S RELATIONSHIP IS NOT CASUAL**
  - A. What James could have said
  - B. What James chose to say
- 2. THE CHRISTIAN’S RESIDENCE IS NOT COINCIDENTAL**
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1. Since 1982, the English Department at San Jose State has sponsored an unusual kind of writing competition. It is called the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest. The contest, held each year, is to see who can compose the opening sentence to the worst of all possible novels.

2. The contest began when a professor researched and discovered the origin of the oft-used line, “It was a dark and stormy night...” Most of the entries involve an absurdly long sentence, and they are all meant to be funny.

3. The website for the contest includes a list of all of the past winners. My favorite is the 1986 winner. That year the opening sentence for the worst of all possible novels was this: “The bone-chilling scream split the warm summer night in two, the first half being before the scream when it was fairly balmy and calm and pleasant for those who hadn't heard the scream at all, but not calm or balmy or even very nice for those who did hear the scream, discounting the little period of time during the actual scream itself when your ears might have been hearing it but your brain wasn't reacting yet to let you know.”<sup>1</sup>

4. At first glance, the opening line to the epistle of James does not seem to hold all that much important and interesting information. Like the other letters of the New Testament period, it begins with the author’s name, his audience, and some sort of greeting.

5. However, when we examine the words used in this simple sentence, we find some inspired instructions. Verse 1 says, “*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.*”

6. As James wrote this line, and began his contribution to Biblical revelation, we believe that he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. That means that each of these words is important and intentional.

7. Look with me at this sentence, and let's pull from it some instruction for our lives as followers of Christ. Notice first of all, from this opening line we learn that:

## **I. THE CHRISTIAN'S RELATIONSHIP IS NOT CASUAL**

1. When we write a letter today, we customarily put our name at the end of the letter. However, in ancient times, the writer's name would come at the beginning.

2. In the New Testament letters, the writer would generally give their name, followed by some identifying statement – some phrase that indicated who they were personally. For instance, Paul begins 6 of his letters with the phrase, "Paul, an apostle..."

3. James follows this pattern. His letter begins with the words, "*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...*" James identifies himself by his relationship to Jesus Christ.

4. When you consider who this James was, and then you look at the words he chose for his introduction, there is a lesson here about the nature of the believer's relationship to Christ.

5. Let me show you what I mean. First of all, think with me about:

### **A. What James could have said**

1. Through the process of elimination, it is at least very likely that the James who wrote this letter in our Bible is the same James that served as a prominent early church leader in the book of Acts.

2. If that is so, then this James has a unique connection that he fails to mention in verse 1. In Galatians 1:19, Paul says this James was the brother of the Lord Jesus.

3. In other words, this James was a son of Joseph and Mary, and the physical half-brother of Jesus Christ. Peter couldn't say that. John could not make that claim. Paul did not have that connection to put on his résumé.

4. James could have opened his letter with the line, "James, the brother of the Son of God." That is what James could have said, but that is not how his letter begins.

5. James could have used his connection to Jesus as a badge of pride and a source of authority, but for James, his relationship to the Lord was much too serious to use simply as a prop for his life, and a sort servant for his personal needs.

6. Unfortunately, too many people do not take their relationship to Jesus as seriously as James did. For many people, Jesus is a sort of spiritual butler that caters to their whims and serves their wants and wishes.

7. If they were James, they would not have hesitated to tell people that they were the brother of Jesus, because that would benefit them, and that is, after all, the only reason they believed in Jesus in the first place – to help themselves.

8. I am told that when you visit the holy land today, alongside all the sacred sites and historic landmarks are no shortage of souvenir stands where you can purchase everything from a replica of the crown of the thorns to t-shirts commemorating your baptism in the Jordan River.

9. In my mind I can imagine that mixture of pilgrims and profiteers, all there in the name of Jesus. It reminds me a little of church. There are some who come because they genuinely love the Lord and desire to serve him. There are others who only come for what they can get out of it.

10. Think with me not only about what James could have said, but think also about:

### **B. What James chose to say**

1. Look again at verse 1. It says, “*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ...*” Mark that word “servant”. It is translated from a word that literally means a slave.

2. Dr. Zodhiates says that this word means more than just a servant. It describes someone “who is deprived of his personal freedom and so becomes fully an instrument in the hands of his master. His is one who can never say ‘No’ to his master.”<sup>iii</sup>

3. Think of that! James could have said, “Hey, listen to me, I grew up with Jesus. I am His half-brother.” However, James chose to say, “I am the willing slave of Jesus Christ. Our relationship is one in which I am His unquestioning servant.”

4. Many Christians want a casual relationship with Jesus, where He is an advisor, but not the authority of their lives. They want to wear His cross as a decoration; not bear it as a disciple.

5. In his opening line James reminds you that while your relationship to Jesus Christ may mean a lot of different things to you, if it is anything less than slavery to His lordship, it is not all that it should be.

6. Angel Trivette is a lot of things to me. She is my friend. She is the mother of my children. She is my partner. She is my roommate. Above all else, however, she is my wife.

7. All the other things that she is to me flow out of our relationship as a husband and wife. To illustrate the importance of this, imagine that if everywhere I went, I introduced Angel by saying, "This is my friend, Angel." Or, what if I said, "This is Tanner and Grace's mom, Angel"?

8. Not only would that be inappropriate, but it would probably get me a permanent bed in the marital dog house.

9. James opens his letter by reminding us of the greatest truth regarding our relationship to Jesus. It is no casual relationship. It is the relationship of a servant to his Master.

10. Notice a second truth we draw from this opening line. Not only do we find that *the Christian's relationship is not casual*, but notice also further that in this introduction we see that:

## **II. THE CHRISTIAN'S RESIDENCE IS NOT COINCIDENTAL**

1. Verse 1 identifies for us the author of this letter, and it also identifies the audience to whom the letter was written. It says, "*James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad...*"

2. Most scholars feel as if this is the earliest of the New Testament epistles, written sometime before the Jerusalem council in A.D. 52. If that is the case, when James writes to the "twelve tribes" he is referring to the Jewish Christians, who at that time were basically the only Christians.

3. This letter, therefore, applies to all of God's people, in all times, and in all ages. Though we are not physically a part of the "twelve tribes", we are the sons and daughters of Abraham through faith.

4. Look again at verse 1. James addresses the people of God "*which are scattered abroad*". This phrase, "scattered abroad", speaks to all of us about where God has placed us in life and in this world.

5. The words of James in this opening verse remind us that where we reside in this life is not a matter of coincidence; it is providence. Notice with me a couple of things we draw from James' reference to the scattered people of God. First of all, notice:

### **A. The persecution that scattered them**

1. When you read this opening verse in its original language, there is a reference here to a historical event. The phrase “scattered abroad”, is translated from a word that gives us our English word “dispersion.”

2. James is referring to an event that dispersed the Jews from Jerusalem into other parts of the world. This happened on numerous occasions, but in Acts 8:1, we find the exact phrase that James uses in his opening verse.

3. Acts 8:1 says, “...*And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad...*” When James refers to the dispersion, he is referring to this particular event.

4. The early church had experienced remarkable growth in the city of Jerusalem following the Day of Pentecost. Luke tells us in Acts that on a daily basis, God was adding to the church.

5. However, the idyllic scene in Jerusalem was broken up by the heavy hammer of persecution. The church had succeeded, but not without suffering.

6. In this opening chapter, James will go on to address the reality of trials and suffering in the lives of God’s people. We are reminded that following Christ is not an exemption from difficulty.

7. With one word, James points us to the fact that Christ’s promise of eternal life in heaven does not mean an easy life on earth.

*Must I be carried to the skies,  
On flowery beds of ease,  
While others fought to win the prize,  
And sailed through bloody seas?*

*Sure I must fight if I would reign;  
Increase my courage, Lord,  
I’ll bear the toil, endure the pain,  
Supported by Thy Word.<sup>iii</sup>*

8. When we consider the scattered people of God to whom James is writing, we see not only the persecution that scattered them, but notice also further:

### **B. The providence that scattered them**

1. The persecution that dispersed the people from Jerusalem was no doubt a hard thing. These early believers were forced to leave home and friends, and travel into new places, where they would start new lives.

2. The dispersion was a painful event, but that did not mean that it was not a providential event. In fact, the very word that James uses in our text points us to the sovereign work of God.

3. The word translated “scattered abroad” in verse 1 is the word *diaspora*. It is a compound of two Greek words, and it literally means “through sowing”.

4. The picture the word paints is of someone scattering seed across a plot of land for the purpose of sowing and planting. In other words, the persecution that pushed these early Christians out of Jerusalem was actually the hand of God scattering them out as seeds to be sown in new places.

5. Back in Acts 8, we find that this is exactly what had happened. Acts 8:4 says, “*Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.*”

6. Think about all that James is saying with this little phrase “scattered abroad”. He is saying to these early Christians, as well as to us, “Where you are in life, whether in prosperity or pain, suffering or success; whether you are at home or far from it, you are there by the providential sowing of God.”

7. So many times we are tempted to ask, “Why am I in this place in life? Why has the Lord allowed me to go through this circumstance, this problem, this crisis?”

8. James reminds us that where we are in life and what we are facing is not the result of a random scattering. God is planting us where He wants us, and is sowing us according to His perfect will. Our residence in life is not coincidental.

9. When birds migrate south for the winter, they are pushed to do so by cold fronts that enter into their homelands. These changes in the temperature alert the birds of the coming winter. It is interesting that the very cold fronts that push those birds toward the south also bring with them a north wind, and clear skies that make the migration easier than at any other time of the year.

10. At times, God will choose to send a cold front into our lives to push us in another direction, seemingly scattering us from where we are comfortable. However, in those spiritual cold fronts, God provides what we need to get us to where we need to be.

11. Notice a third truth we draw from this opening line in the book of James. We see here not only that *the Christian’s relationship is not casual*, and *the Christian’s residence is not coincidental*, but notice also lastly in the words James uses, we see that:

### **III. THE CHRISTIAN’S REJOICING IS NOT CONDITIONAL**

1. Look again at this introductory verse. It says, *“James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.”*

2. James finishes the sentence with the word “greeting”. This is an interesting word for James to use. It is the same word he later used in his letter to the Gentile churches in Acts 15.

3. The word translated “greeting” in this text was a common way of addressing someone, much as we say, “Hello”, or “good-bye”. The word, however, has a significant meaning in light of who James is addressing, and what he is going to say to them.

4. The word translated as “greeting” in verse 1, literally means “to rejoice”. One writer suggests that the deeper meaning of the word is “to be satisfied”.<sup>iv</sup>

5. Think about this word that James chooses to use in his introductory verse, and notice a couple of things it says to us about a Christian’s joy and rejoicing. First of all, think about this word in light of:

#### **A. Who he was addressing**

1. Look at the verse again. James essentially says, “To those who have been uprooted from your home and forced out into new and strange places, rejoice.”

2. In light of what his readers had experienced, you almost expect James to say, “...to those who’ve been scattered abroad, condolences.” When you understand the word “greeting” at the close of verse 1, it is almost as if James has said the wrong thing.

3. Years ago, President Ronald Reagan was welcoming Prince Charles and his new bride, Princess Diana to a dinner in Washington, D.C., when he said, “...and express also our great happiness that Princess David is here on her first trip to the United States.”

4. When you hear James say, “rejoice,” to a group of people who had suffered so much, it seems like a strange thing to say.

5. In reality, it is not all that strange in light of what Jesus taught. In the beatitudes, Jesus addressed people with similar hardships, and told them that they were blessed.

6. He said, “Blessed are they that mourn...,” “Blessed are the poor in spirit...,” “Blessed are they that are persecuted...” The Word of God speaks to those who are hurting, and its message is consistent with the greeting in James.

7. The Bible was not written for people whose lives are perfect, painless, and pleasant. It was written to people who are struggling and suffering.

8. When you consider this word “greeting” at the close of verse 1, notice with me not only who he was addressing, but notice also further:

### **B. What he was asserting**

1. When James wrote this word “greeting” into the close of verse 1, he was not simply tagging a sentence with a cordial word; he was asserting a theological truth.

2. Over the next few verses, James elaborates upon the principle that even in trials and adversity, the Christian has reason to rejoice. In other words, our joy and therefore our rejoicing are not circumstantial and conditional – they are eternal.

3. Yes, these people had been uprooted and scattered into new and strange places. Yes, their lives had been interrupted and upset by persecution. All this was painfully true.

4. Nevertheless, they could still rejoice. James could still write to them with all candor and honesty, and greet them with the word, “rejoice”.

5. Why? I think Paul explains it best in Philippians 4:4. *“Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice.”*

6. Their joy was not in their situation; it was in their Savior. They rejoiced, not because their lives were good, but because their Lord was good!

7. James opens his very practical epistle with a word that can be on our lips even when there is sorrow in our lives – rejoice! Because of Who we serve, joy is never conditional. As long as Jesus is Lord, we can rejoice!

8. The story is told of a foreign king who traveled often, but one day a man living near the palace said to a friend, “Well, it looks like the king is home tonight.” The friend said, “How do you know that?” The man pointed toward the king’s house and said, “Because when the king is home, the castle is all lit up.”

9. Joy is the undimmed light in the life of a believer that shows the King of kings is at home in their heart. James says, “To all you scattered, battered, and tattered saints, rejoice.”

1. Several years ago, a preacher that I know published a book, and through some connections, he was able to get the late Dr. Adrian Rogers to right the forward.
2. With no offense to the preacher, I have to say that the forward is the best part of the book.
3. There is a lot more to the book of James than this one, brief, introductory verse. However, this one verse holds a book's worth of truth.
4. In it James sets the stage for what he is going to say, and he reminds believers of the seriousness of their relationship to Christ, the sovereignty of their place in life, and the steadiness of their joy in Jesus.
5. It is just the introduction, but may we find in it some instruction for our lives.

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<sup>i</sup> Lyttony of Grand Prize Winners, *bulwer-lytton.com*, accessed 7/30/09, <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com/lyttony.htm>

<sup>ii</sup> Zodiates, Spiros, Faith, Love, Hope, (AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, TN, 1985), p. 14

<sup>iii</sup> Watts, Isaac, Am I a Soldier of the Cross?, 1784

<sup>iv</sup> Zodiates, Spiros, p. 18