

Building the Foundation:  
An Introduction to the Book of James

Acts 15: 1-29  
1 Corinthians 3:1-23

Today maybe a little shorter than usual because my goal for this time is to just set forth an introduction and I really did not want to start diving into James until some basic ground work had been done. Instead of just doing a short introduction I thought that we should spend some time going through some of the technical aspects because it will help us to understand this book as we move through it.

So last week we finished up our journey through the book of Galatians where Paul put forth a very strong argument against the practice of keeping the Mosaic Law and living a life through Faith. He said that the whole law was fulfilled in one statement, to Love your neighbor as yourself. So I thought that it would be interesting to follow up the study in Galatians with a journey through the book of James because many people understand to be James to be preaching a different gospel than Paul.

While Paul throughout his writing taught justification through Faith alone apart from works James teaches that without works, your faith is dead. With just a casual look, we can see why many perceive a stark contrast between the two. So my goal as we study through James is to bring a synergy and balance between these 2 books. I think that there has been a lot of misunderstanding of the purpose and intention of the book of James by a lot of people, but before we can really start diving into it we need to lay out the ground work, or foundation to build from.

Just like with building a house, if the foundation isn't solid the house will inevitably fall on itself. so my goal for today is to just build the foundation for our study to help us gather a proper understanding of this book as we progress through it and to help us work through the highly controversial, contentious areas.

I am not going to bother going into the debate as to whether this book should or should not be included in scripture, it has been widely accepted as cannon from the early church dating all the way back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. Even Martin Luther who had some of the most severe criticism of the book of James still considered it canonical. Martin Luther made a distinction between Paul's work which he referred to it as the Chief books of the bible, and the books such as Hebrews, James, and Jude he called the Epistles of Straw eluding to 1 Corinthians where it talks about each of our works will be tested by fire and that which is built upon a foundation of Christ will remain, and all other works of wood, hay, and straw will be consumed and burned. Luther was liking the book of James to a work of Straw, meaning that in the end the things that are wrong in the book will burn up but the precious gems that are in it will stay.

Luther's understanding of the book of James makes perfect sense if we think about where he was coming from. We will be celebrating the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation this year. The day that Luther nailed his 95 thesis to the door of the All Saint's Church. In it he argued against the church's sale of indulgences, a way that people could somehow purchase their forgiveness through the church. Luther's entire argument could be summed up that salvation is by faith alone and not of works. And that Forgiveness of Sin is only granted by God not the church. So when James says in chapter 2 that a man is justified by his works and not by faith alone we can see why Luther would be very sensitive to such language.

Now please do not mistake me here, I have no intention of being disrespectful of Martin Luther but I believe that he was mistaken in making such a distinction between Chief books, and what he saw as Epistles of Straw. I base this argument off of one key doctrine, which is the doctrine of the inspiration of scripture through the Holy Spirit. All of the Authors of the new testament were inspired by God as to what to write and I think we need to be careful that we do not take away from God's inspirational work through these authors by holding one author higher than another. I believe that all of scripture was inspired by God and that there is no such thing as an epistle of straw or secondary books, As 2 Timothy 3:16 says, All of Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness that the man of God maybe complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. That includes even the controversial, and confusion parts of scripture. And we can not simply just write them off as lesser, or not as important because it is all the word of God. I think that if we start to try to organize scripture by what authors we deem to be more spiritual, or more authoritative, does not properly give the respect deserved to the Holy Spirit and God's inspiration of these so called lesser books. That being the case though, it means that we have a challenge to try to find synergy between passages in scripture that seem to be contradictory to each other and we need to strive to understand them

So today we will be focusing on the boring technical stuff but I believe that it is very important if we are to properly understand this book. The first thing we will look at this morning is the Authorship of this book. It looks like it is pretty cut and dried, I mean It says right in the first verse who wrote this book, It says right there in fact, its the first word...it says James. So, you would think that it is kinda of a no brainer...but the issue arises when one tries to determine which James it was that actually wrote this book.

This is one of the first debated things, and it actually is the first block in the construction of our foundation. There were actually 4 different James' in the bible that are believed to have possibly been the authors of this book. The first being James, the Son of Zebedee, brother to John who was one of Jesus 12 disciples There was also James the son of Alphaes who was another one of Jesus' 12 disciples. The 3<sup>rd</sup> possibility is that it is James the Father of Judas, is not the Judas Iscariot who betrayed Christ, but rather another Judas who also followed Jesus. And Lastly there is James, Jesus' brother.

Now As if that wasn't enough options it is also debated that this book could have been written by an unknown James, or someone else entirely just posing as James. But Most Theologians today agree that this book was written by James the brother of Jesus. They argue that James the son of Alphaes, and James the father of Judas are to minor, with not much reference to them in scripture to have written this book. They argue that because this letter starts out simply by stating his name in the salutation without any descriptors as to who he is then it must be written by a well known, predominant person throughout the churches of the time.

So that leaves us with James the Son of Zebedee the brother of John, and James the brother of Christ. But when we look at the potential dates of when this book was written there arises an issue if it is to be John's brother James who wrote it, for it was recorded in Acts that he was martyred in AD 44 which would put his death to early to have written this book for it is believed that this book was written around that time.

So the strongest evidence points that this book was actually written by James the brother of Jesus which make sense because he was the most predominate of the James at the time being a leader in the Jerusalem churches, so he wouldn't really need much of an introduction. There is also the audience to which this book was written to take into consideration. Verse 1 tells us that this book was written to the

twelve tribes that were scattered abroad. This also would point to James the Brother of Jesus for he was a leader in the churches in Jerusalem primarily teaching, preaching, and witnessing to the Jews just as Peter and John were. So it makes sense that he would be concerned for the Jews who were scattered abroad that they maybe falling away.

The next important block to place while building our foundation is the Date as to when this was written. This is a rather easy one since we have already established which James it was who wrote this book and this actually becomes a key pivotal piece to understanding this entire letter. Most scholars agree that this book was written mid AD 40 and the reason why that is believed is key to understanding the purpose and tone of this letter.

IF we go to Galatians Chapter 2 we see Paul recounting a visit he had in Jerusalem. If you remember there arose a debate about circumcision and the Mosaic Law. Men from Jerusalem claiming to have been sent by James came to the Churches in Galatia teaching that they must become Jews to truly be justified and taught that the gentiles must submit to the Mosaic Law. Paul was concerned that the Leaders in the Jerusalem churches were teaching a different gospel then he was, so he says in verse 1 of chapter 2...after 14 years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and also took Titus with me And I went up by revelation and communicated to them that gospel which I preached among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation lest by any means I might run, or had run in vain.

Paul met with the leaders of the churches in Jerusalem to hash out these perceived differences. Another thing to note here, even though these Judaizers in Galatians were claiming to have been sent by James it is widely believed that James did not actually send them. The reason is because these false teachers were teaching Judaism not Christianity, and James never taught the adherence to Jewish laws and traditions.

Picking back up in verse 7 Paul says when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me as the gospel for the circumcised was to peter, for he who worked effectively in peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the gentiles, and when James, Cephas which is Peter, and John who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship that we should go to the gentiles and they to the circumcised. This is why establishing the Authorship of James is important, because the James mentioned here is James the brother of Jesus, who we find out in Acts 15 was in total agreement with Paul's doctrines. So, basically that gives us a key to understanding James. It shows us that James is not a lesser book with contradicting mistakes, but rather we need to wrestle through to figure out what James is teaching.

So back to establishing the date It is believed that this book was written in the mid AD 40's before this meeting that is recorded in Acts 15 and is seen as a a response to Paul's teaching that was spreading across the church. Just as Paul was concerned that Peter, James and John may have been teaching something other then he was, James may have been concerned in what he was hearing about Paul's teaching. So with that in mind as we go through this book, it will help us to understand James' focus on works of faith as opposed to Paul's focus on faith through Grace.

By the time of them meeting up in Acts 15 Paul's doctrine would have spread all across the churches. As we have seen in Galatians, Paul argues so heavily against the law, and against traditions of men, that if not understood correctly people would believe they could continue in their sin since it is forgiven by God anyway, and it isn't really their action, or works that matter. If we understand that this may have

been a spreading view through the church at the time, and I think it was, for even Paul confronted it in Romans when he said, Should we sin so grace may abound? Certainly Not. Paul had to reign in those who heard his teaching believing that they were free to do whatever they wanted even sin. So I don't think it is too far off to think that this was going on in the churches, and was more than likely the reports that James was receiving. Knowing this we can start to understand James' mindset and where he was coming from when writing this book.

Understanding which James it was who wrote this book and what date it was probably written helps us to set a foundation to understand how this book actually synergies with Paul's teaching. I argue that instead of being in contrast of each other they actually are teaching the same thing from two different perspectives. We see here in Acts 15 that James, and Paul both agree that the gospel they are teaching are actually the same. Peter, James and John extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas understanding that they were all teaching and preaching the same gospel.

So our challenge then as we go through James will be to make sense of what seems to be controversies. These 2 authors, had 2 different audiences. Paul wrote to the Gentiles who were constantly under pressure by men from Jerusalem to conform to the Jewish traditions, and James wrote to the Jews who he feared may have been tempted to fall into a life of sin by a miss understanding of Paul's teaching of Liberty. I think that both Authors really are very relevant in churches today, Paul's writing focuses on God's work in salvation through faith and helps to fight against legalism, and self promotion. And James comes from the other side, to act as a balance that we do not use our liberty as a license to sin. While we maybe free from the law, we are not free to live a life in sin.

I think if we keep all of these things in mind as we work our way through James we will find that things that are understood as being contradictory, are in fact two sides of the same coin. So now that we have built the foundation for our study in James we will start digging into it next week.