

James Part One: Dive

📄 trashyourbible.com/james-blog/part-one-dive

November 25,
2017

ONE MOMENT CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE

Here I sit on my own contemplating the last couple of days. My family is shattered, my mother is distraught. My brother has been put to death as a criminal. I am trying to work out where it all went wrong. I mean, how can this be, how can we get through this? Lost in my memories, I reminisce of a time when we were a family. All of us together, our eldest brother a carpenter. We lived a quiet life, we were a good Jewish family. Every now and then, Mum would bring up the incredible miracle that was my brother's birth. There was that day that He stayed at the temple and Mum and Dad couldn't find Him, boy was He in trouble when He got home! And Dad would tell stories of how an angel came and gave him instructions. But here He was, a 30 year old man and His life was normal, nothing spectacular had happened.

And then one day He goes down to that crazy man and gets baptised. It all began at that point, the delusions of grandeur; He gathered a gang of people to follow Him, He was healing people, He was saying that He was the Son of God, the Messiah. For three years, our family had to endure the shame; our brother was the enemy of our Rabbi, our elders despised Him, wanted to kill Him. How we tried to reason with Him, we went to Him but He disowned us. And now, as a family, we have been given the ultimate shame, our brother has been put to death with all the other criminals. My mother wouldn't leave Him when He died, and now He has been in the tomb for three days and she hasn't stopped praying. This is too much humiliation for one family to bear, how are we going to recover from this? What will my future be, the brother of a criminal, who died a cursed man?

| **1 C 15:7** *'Then he appeared to James...'*

Jesus ... Oh my goodness, you're alive! It was all true!

Imagine the moment that James, the brother of Jesus, was visited by his dead brother. When you read the Bible, don't skip over the moments. Five words can change a life! Check out these five from 1 Corinthians.

Some scholars believe that this James was in fact, James the brother of Jesus. And this was the point at which James first believed that his brother was the Son of God. You can imagine the shock; you have just watched your brother die a criminal's death, your mother

is distraught, you don't believe in Him as the Messiah and then He rises from the dead and comes to visit you! This one moment changes your life forever.

James, from this point, becomes the greatest advocate for the Church. He ends up being the leader of the Church in Jerusalem. Now open up your Bible to James and read the first verse: *'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.'* This significant statement is not to be overlooked. He is talking about his brother. Without his encounter with the risen Christ, this statement and this incredible book would have never been written. James has had such a revelation of Jesus that he can now say that the One he grew up with, the One who annoyed him when he was a child, the One who he wrestled with as a boy, was, in fact, Lord Jesus Christ.

You see, James had a huge obstacle to overcome, he had to overcome familiarity. He was familiar with Jesus, he lived with Him, grew up with Him, and seeing Jesus as a natural man for 30 years made it very hard for him to believe that He was, in fact, the Messiah, the Son of God. John touches briefly on this struggle.

| **J 7:5** *'For even his own brothers did not believe in him.'*

But this encounter with the risen Jesus changed everything! Sometimes, we have to get over the natural circumstances and see the impossibility that is the Kingdom of God. Don't let the natural stop you from believing in the supernatural power of God. Don't let familiarity stop you from seeing all that God is doing in and through you. Don't be so consumed by the natural world that you stop believing in miracles.

I love James. He has a way of writing that is so black and white, no wonder later in life he was called James the Just. Everything about James is fairness and truth, he has no middle ground. But he writes with so many incredible metaphors and imagery that we know he was super creative. Have you ever listened to a preacher and they are making you laugh, and entertaining you but then you come out and realise that you had heart surgery? You come out convicted and changed but you laughed the whole way through it. That is James; he is writing so that you can increase in maturity but it is with such beautiful imagery and creative elegance that you feel like you are being rocked into obedience not beaten.

| **J 1:11** *'For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business.'*

This is one of the most creative rebukes of the rich I have ever seen.

Again, look at James Chapter 3: Taming the Tongue–this is the most incredible imagery with ships, horses, forests set on fire, taming of animals, birds and reptiles and praising. In the most incredible, beautiful and creative way James is rebuking our mouths for being evil

and full of deadly poison.

Throughout the letter he uses this incredible imagery to rebuke and train. One minute he is calling them '*brothers and sisters*' and the next he calls them '*you foolish person*'. This is a letter from a leader, one who is calling his church to a new level of maturity in Christ. He is writing to a church that has been scattered amongst the nations in Chapter 1:1 '*To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations*' and he is calling them to stand their ground, to be strong and mature and to keep going in the midst of suffering and trials.

Now I understand that the book of James is quite controversial because some feel that it contradicts the teaching of Paul and Ryan Kerrison is going to go deeper into this in our Deep Dive this week. I believe that the book of James is an essential step in the New Testament journey and complements Paul's writing not contradicts it. James is a leader that calls mature Christians to action. Once you are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, you have to do something with it. You can't sit on your salvation and say 'I'm good'. No! You have to have works, actions, deeds with your faith, go and do something with your freedom. Go and share this freedom with others, your salvation has to have legs! We are saved *for* good works!

Have a great time reading the book of James, you are going to love it! Read it as the brother of Jesus, read it as the head of the Church in Jerusalem calling his people to a life of action in the Kingdom. Read it as a leader calling his church to maturity. Journey through the incredible imagery and hear James say to you, '*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourself. Do what it says.*' (1:22)

James Part One: Deep Dive

📄 trashyourbible.com/james-blog/part-one-deep-dive

November 24,
2017

THE EPISTLE OF STRAW OR AN INCREDIBLE JEWISH LETTER | RYAN KERRISON

From the theologically honest, yet exegetically erroneous charge by Luther, labelling it the “epistle of straw”, to contemporary scholars relegating it to a secondary status within the canon, the Book of James has far and above survived the critique of many. Filled with direct, no-nonsense statements, exhortations to prayer, saving faith, utterly pragmatic instruction, and my own personal favourite, taming the tongue, James remains one of my favourite epistles in the entire bible. This Deep Dive will be a little different to the usual odyssey into Greco-Roman, or Ancient Jewish culture, rather it will be some of my own reflections, thoughts and observations from within the epistle of James. I hope you enjoy and find something within this book for yourself!

The first thing I noticed, reading James was the book is absolutely Jewish. Sometimes being called the “Proverbs” and “Amos”. Proverbs, due to its harmonisation of practical wisdom and the challenge to work out one’s faith, and Amos due to its uncompromising and often scathing rebuke of hypocrisy and sin. I love what Unger writes, “If the several passages referring to Christ were eliminated, the whole epistle would be as proper in the canon of the Old Testament as it is in the New Testament. In fact, the epistle could be described as an interpretation of the Old Testament law and the Sermon on the Mount in the light of the Gospel of Christ.” Now this is something one would expect from the author, the half-brother of Jesus, being raised in a Jewish context, however, due to the Hellenistic and assorted Pagan influences of the day, the fact that James remains so “Jewish” is astounding, and I think, really reminds present readers of the story of the Jewish nation, and ultimately the story of God.

My second observation, and probably my favourite thing about James, is his inseparable connection of hearing and doing the Word. For James, merely ‘talking the talk’ is not good enough. This challenge, like many others in James, is charged toward the attitudes of the rich and poor of society, manifesting itself as conflict within the church, which is seen often. This is a fantastic, and strong reminder to not just pick up one’s Christianity thirty minutes before church, nurture it, and love it for 90 minutes, then drop it at the door, rather as something to listen to and obey throughout one’s life.

You cannot read James effectively and miss his encouragement, no, command! “Count it all

as joy brothers when you meet trials” and ladies, don’t think that that word ‘brothers’ means you’ve got it made, that’s simply a product of Jewish vernacular. James means EVERYONE when he says to count trials as joy. It’s counter-intuitive, I concede, but the Kingdom of God is like that! This implication serves a double purpose, that even though James is writing to Jewish Christians, he means everyone in the Kingdom of God. It’s little pieces of poorly interpreted language that make a lot of difference when interpreting a text! I love what Tom Wright says in his commentary on the book around this notion, “Those who follow the Messiah are not supposed to just survive. They are supposed to count, to make a difference in the world, whether through the quiet daily witness of a faithful and gentle life or the chance, given to some, to speak or act in a way which reveals the gospel to many others.” It is these reasons amongst many others that I find myself in agreement with New Testament scholar, Douglas Moo, that the epistle of James, should move us as believers today, to realise the eschatology that lies before us, and allow it to affect our present and deal with the sin in our lives and the lives of others, and to seek God and His eternal wisdom for the sake of our salvation process and His everlasting glory.

James Part Two: Dive

🔗 trashyourbible.com/james-blog/part-two-dive

November 23,
2017

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM JAMES

Imagine being a leader of a church where your people are being hunted down, imprisoned and killed for their faith. You appoint seven leaders and watch one of them get killed before your eyes, stoned to death. And as you turn your head to see the people responsible for killing your leader you see a man handing the coats of the assassins back to them and congratulating them on a job well done.

You go back to your Church which has reduced considerably because most of your families have fled the area due to the persecution. This is what Jesus said would happen, this is harder to cope with than you imagined. You are passionate about this Church, you are passionate about ensuring that the 'world' doesn't infiltrate the customs that are in place. You are passionate about the ones that have left, that they remain in Christ and continue on in maturity. Peter and John established this place and now it's your turn as the Senior Minister.

A few days later, you hear that the very man you saw approving of the killing of your elder, has been saved and here he stands in front of you asking to preach in your pulpit. Asking you to believe that he is now saved; but you question it, is this a trap? Is he trying to infiltrate your church to harm what is left of your flock? Barnabus believes in him, but you are not sure. You send him away to get established in the faith before you will endorse him. This is the headquarters of a movement now, this is your responsibility to keep the people going, you pray earnestly to your Lord, your Saviour, your brother. Help me Lord Jesus, give me wisdom!

The relationship between Paul and James that is described in the book of Acts, is really quite unusual. James is an incredible man, leading the Jerusalem Church that was birthed at Pentecost (Acts 2), that was scattered out into the different areas due the persecution mentioned in Acts 8:1. The person doing the persecution is Saul, the very man that would become it's greatest supporter and builder of all time. We see from Paul's point of view what his salvation looked like in Acts 9, but we have to remember that there were very few people at this miraculous salvation. It didn't happen at a Church in front of a congregation of people, it happened on the road to Damascus with a of couple assistants watching. So,

when Saul turns up to the very Church he had just persecuted and caused to flee across the country, and you are one of the leaders of that Church, how do you react? You are torn between protection for you flock and obeying the will of God for this movement.

As we read the stories of the Bible we can, at times, make them into fairy tales of people who act perfectly in all situations. But these were normal men and women with normal human reactions. When I read the book of James I hear how black and white he is, how strong he is in calling his church to maturity, how protective he is of them calling them 'brothers and sisters'. James primary concern in this book is the protection of his scattered people, he is concerned that the world will influence their lives. Some say that this book is in fact James protecting his flock from the teaching of Paul. With the book being dated before the Jerusalem Council debate in Acts 15, I think it is more a development of the church than it is an outright rebuke. I will explain later.

As you read the book of James, know this is an incredible leader that is writing to you. You are going to hear James address being double-minded, doing what the Word says not just reading it, not showing favouritism, not having faith without actions, not being uncontrolled and critical with your words, not being arrogant, slandering or being dishonest in business. This is a message from a strong leader.

I love the leadership of James. This strong man who is un-waivering and committed to the building of the Church in Jerusalem is the very leader called to Pastor the strongest, most passionate, revolutionary Christian of our time – Paul. The terrorist turned evangelist.

James leads his church with strength and conviction. He addresses the issues that need to be addressed and stands firm as the leader in the midst of the strength of other leaders and ministries rising around him. James, later in life called James the Just, is a leader of strength, integrity and consistency.

Here are some leadership lessons that I have learnt from the relationship between James and Paul

BE STRONG IN WHO YOU ARE

In the midst of the 'Paul' revival of the 1st Century, James maintains his leadership in the Church. Paul was a mighty revolutionary, preaching up a storm everywhere he went. It would have been easy for James to get intimidated or threatened by Paul and shut his ministry down. But he doesn't, he endorses, guides, and listens to Paul's opinion, even when it contradicts and changes his way of thinking. James and Paul were both strong in who they were called to be and in that strength, they developed the Church that we stand upon today.

These two men were very different, James is black and white and traditional in his

understanding of the gospel, Paul is the new kid on the block and preaches a gospel of grace. James is the protective Pastor taking care of his flock, Paul is the new renegade with new ideas that at times seem contradictory to the way the church is going. But both having strength in what they each bring individually to the church, they are strong in who they are and who God called them to be. An insecure leader will destroy the people underneath and around them. But James in strength leads his church into a new day with this new teaching.

DON'T BE AFRAID OF DISAGREEMENTS

I love that in Acts 15 we see Paul, Peter and James have a very passionate discussion about the disagreement of how gentiles are to be included in the people of God. The Bible tells us the truth and shows us that Church life is not going to be easy sailing with everyone agreeing. But I love that James lead his church through this time that could have split the church in two. Would we have the incredible church and doctrine that we have today, if James did not lead the early church through the Act 15 debate as well as he did? Would we have the church that we have today if James was scared of people disagreeing with him and shut Paul down and his ministry? When people disagree with your way of leading or teaching it is an opportunity for growth, for you and for them. It is a new shoot growing out of a different area of the tree that you didn't expect and you need to be careful not to cut it off just because you are threatened by the disagreement. Rise to the occasion, be a bigger leader yourself to lead bigger people. I love that James allowed Paul to disagree and voice his opinion, heard him out and then re-set the rules for the gentiles on what Paul said. Read the account of this discussion in Acts 15 and take note of James as the leader of the church. His role is strong and he doesn't lose his authority in the midst of the debate, you see this in the fact that he speaks last, the leader always finished the discussion and made the ruling.

SUBMISSION IS THE KEY NO MATTER WHAT YOU DO IN THE CHURCH

When you see the relationship between Paul and James, both men remain humble and submitted to Jesus and to his church. Paul is not a renegade preacher that goes off on his own tangent as some would have us to believe. Time and time again you see in Acts that he goes back and reports what he is doing to the Jerusalem church. He gives tithes to the Jerusalem church throughout his ministry, he is a man submitted to leadership. He is fiery, passionate, revolutionising the Christian world of the 1st Century but not a rebellious renegade. He calls the church into correction, he challenges Peter when he feels he has overstepped the line in relation to his beloved Gentiles, he voices his disagreement but he is a man under the submission of Jesus and the Church in Jerusalem.

Reading the book of James is such an incredible insight into one of the Churches founding

leaders. He is black and white, strong, creative, traditional and passionate about his people and his church. He leads the church through the greatest time of growth and development and it is that foundation that we stand today.

Have a great time gleaning from the leader of the Jerusalem Church in the 1st Century: James.

James Part Two: Deep Dive

📄 trashyourbible.com/james-blog/part-two-deep-dive

November 22,
2017

| **NATHAN ROSS**

The book of James is such an intriguing, challenging and confronting book that has been able to endure high levels of scrutiny and remain a part of what we would now consider the New Testament canon. The book of James faced a large degree of resistance, even by major theologians such as Irenaeus and Luther, due to contentious areas such as authorship, date, but most importantly the theology contained within the book of James.

It has been typically claimed that the book of James does not contain any theology due to its lack of explicit theological teaching or referencing on the person and work of Jesus Christ. Rather it can be considered theological in the way that the author presents a kind of teaching, or sermon, on the reality of a theological commitment in practice. The book of James contains theological insight into areas of trials and temptations, wisdom, the power of words, and lastly the balance of faith and deeds. This balance of faith and deeds, particularly found in the passage of James 2:14-26, is the topic that this Deep Dive will be concerned with.

The teaching found in James on the topic of faith and deeds is often viewed as an outright conflict to the teachings of Paul and Christ himself, but we hope to expound on the scriptures and develop an understanding that such paradoxical teachings complement each other and are essential to be held in balance for a healthy Christian faith. The apparent disagreement of the teachings of Paul and of James can be summarized in the following scriptures;

“For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from work in the law.” Romans 3:28 (ESV)

“You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone” James 2:24 (ESV)

After a quick read through of those scriptures, even when including the surrounding passages, it would appear that they are quite polar opposite right?

The point of confusion arises when we take into consideration what Paul states in 2 Timothy 3:16; “all scripture is God-breathed”. Thus if we believe that the Holy Spirit divinely inspired both Paul and James so that their writings are ‘God-breathed’, and also assert that God is whole and unable to be divided, then we must also assert that by nature these scriptures are literally unable to disagree with each other. So this leaves us with one of two

solutions. Firstly we could declare that the author James was not in fact divinely inspired and the book of James should have no place in the canon of scripture. Or secondly, we could arrive at the conclusion that these scriptures are not antithetical but are rather reconciled within the whole realm of scripture. This latter conclusion is what we will continue to explore.

To start an exploration of the complementary nature of these scriptures we must first explore the individual cultural context and purpose of the books of James and Romans.

Paul's purpose in his epistle to the Romans is to counteract a Jewish tendency to rely on the obedience of the law for an entryway into salvation, along with religious and cultural discrimination. Paul does so through an emphasis that it is by faith alone, through grace, that an individual is justified (see Romans 3:28). Similarly, James is attempting to counteract an attitude that has distorted faith into a mere doctrinal orthodoxy or belief. And does so by emphasizing the need for works (see James 2:24). This conclusion is further solidified when we consider that the book of James was written between 5 and 10 years post-Paul's letter to the Romans. So we can understand that Paul's revolutionary teaching on the justification by faith was developing a Christian body of believers that leant towards an emphasis on belief over action. James was the perfect person to speak to this. Firstly, as the leader of the church at Jerusalem, James would certainly have seen this influence first hand and would have the authority to appropriately attempt to balance Paul's teaching. Further, just as Katie covered in the Dive last week, James, due to his relation to Jesus, had to personally overcome the obstacle of familiarity and he encourages his readers to do the same. To move past a familiarity with our faith and into an unfamiliarity and uncomfotability that true faith calls us to step out into.

These passages found in both Romans and James utilize the same Greek word 'ergon' – which means works, deeds, or labour, but just as we have seen that their contexts are vastly different we cannot apply the same interpretation onto both passages but rather must also consider their individual applications accordingly.

This is where we come to the conclusion that James and Paul are actually speaking of a different kind of works. Paul is speaking of a work towards salvation, and how this in itself will never produce salvation. But James speaks of works that come out of salvation, a kind of works that act as an external evidence of an internal faith. It is a difference that is distinguished by the fruitlessness of pre-conversion work and the necessity of post-conversion works.

For these reasons we can understand that the teaching of Paul and James are actually reconciled. Just as it is not faith or deeds, but faith and deeds, they are two halves to a whole. The power of scripture comes not when it is isolated or removed but when it is considered in its totality. When we look at the big picture through the lens of reconciliation we are left with the statement that we have been saved by grace for good works. Or as

Spurgeon describes in his sermon “it is a faith which produces works which save us; the works do not save us, but a faith which does not produce works is a faith that will only deceive, and cannot lead us into heaven”.

Christ was this perfect example of the balance of faith and works. He did not undergo the work of dying on the cross to save himself, but rather to save others. We are also, to some extent, called to do the same – do works for the sake of saving others.