

James Part Two: Dive

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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.