

Sermon or Lesson: James 1:1 (NIV based)
[Lesson Questions included]

TITLE: The Testimony of James About His Half-brother Jesus

INTRO: Do you have any siblings and were they annoying or worse when you all were growing up? Has your opinion of your siblings changed over the years to where you now hold them in extreme high regard and submit to everything they say?

Being similar to this, let's consider James and his change of opinion of his half-brother Jesus.

READ - James 1:1

[Lesson Question: What do we know about James, the writer of this book?]

SECTION POINT: James, the writer of this book, was a half-brother of Jesus, and he initially did not believe that Jesus was the Christ.

- - James was a half-brother of Jesus (Matthew 13:55-56); Jesus had the Holy Spirit as His biological father whereas His siblings had Joseph. (Matthew 1:18)
 - - Initially, James did not believe that his half-brother Jesus was the Christ (the Anointed One from God). (John 7:5)
 - - James changed his opinion and beliefs about his half-brother Jesus, perhaps not until when Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection. (1 Corinthians 15:7)
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[Lesson Question: What would it have been like for James to grow up with a sibling who was / is God?]

SECTION POINT: Growing up with half-brother Jesus, James probably regarded his brother somewhat negatively.

James would probably say:

- - "We had usual sibling rivalries but Jesus never fought back."
 - - "Jesus almost never got in trouble with our parents."
 - - "Jesus was a know-it-all, it seemed easy for him to always come up with an irrefutable comment."
 - - "Our parents always treated him like he was something special, like a king."
 - - "When talking about religion, Jesus tended at times to speak somewhat cryptically."
 - - "Jesus started his own religious sect and thought he was some kind of religious guru."
 - - "Jesus smarted off to the wrong people too many times, which eventually got him executed - horribly."
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TRANSITION: From these sibling dynamics, imagine how hard it would be for James to diametrically change his regard for Jesus.

[Lesson Question: What is James' subsequent reaction to seeing his half-brother Jesus resurrected?]

SECTION POINT: Upon seeing his half-brother Jesus resurrected, James' subsequent reaction was to believe in Jesus as being deity, the Lord, and as being Christ, the Anointed One from God.

- - James thought his half-brother Jesus is "glorious" and warranted his faith. (v.2:1)
 - - He acknowledges the deity of his half-brother Jesus - calling Him "Lord", and "Christ"
 - meaning the "Messiah" or Anointed One from God. (v.1:1; Strong's #5547)
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[Lesson Question: What is James' subsequent response upon realizing and accepting the deity of his half-brother Jesus?]

SECTION POINT: Upon realizing, accepting, and believing the deity of his half-brother Jesus, James put his faith into action by becoming a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ and writing this letter to promote this faith to the Jews throughout the world.

- - James now is "a servant ... of the Lord Jesus Christ" (v.1:1).
 - - Thus, James acknowledges that his half-brother Jesus deserves to be both worshipped and served as God.
 - - As a function of being a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, James writes a letter to fellow Jews throughout the world - "to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations". (v.1)
 - - He is writing to provide religious instruction and to promote practical Christian living that follows what Jesus taught. (v.2:1)
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[Lesson Question: From information in the New Testament about the Jews during this time, what was wrong with their faith in God, generally speaking, and how does it relate to why James writes this book?]

SECTION POINT: The Jewish religion that James was raised in during this time had significant problems, some of which James addresses in this letter.

Background on and problems of the Jewish religion during this time:

- - Many Jews had an extensive knowledge of Scriptures.
- - The zealous Jews practiced their religion quite vigorously and strictly.
- - They thought they were justified before God by their religious heritage and by their practice of religious rituals.
- They inserted into the authority of Scriptures countless numbers of man-made rules that:
 - - - - were derived from their interpretations of Scriptures;
 - - - - became an additional basis for their moral standards;
 - - - - were elevated to hold authority equal to that of Scriptures;
 - - - - extended unacceptably beyond the content and intent of Scriptures;
 - - - - became oppressive or perverted.

- - Consequently, their religion was not practiced authentically or sincerely from the heart with an attitude right with God.
 - - Their extreme religiosity was not generating the kind of living that is pleasing to God; i.e. - they were not properly applying the extensive knowledge they had about God and faith.
 - - Thereupon, James writes this book in order to establish guidelines for 'practical Christian living' (the theme of this book).
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[Lesson Question: What was the religiosity of the Gentiles during this time, in comparison to that of the Jews?]

SECTION POINT: For comparison, Gentile religions during this time typically worshipped false gods.

- - The Gentiles were pagans, i.e. they did not worship the true God at all nor knew anything about Him.
 - - But they instead worshipped countless false gods and idols.
 - - Their justification before their false gods was based upon good works, i.e. do good to appease their gods.
 - - Their moral standards were based relative to the types of gods they were serving and were thereby not based on Scriptures.
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[Lesson Question: How does the religiosity of our culture and society today compare to the Jews and to the Gentiles of that time?]

SECTION POINT: For further comparison, the religiosity of our culture or society today is typically and essentially self worship.

- - Our culture has very little or essentially no accurate Scriptural knowledge.
 - - There is very little or no depth to any aspects of faith.
 - - Moral standards are based upon each person's own desired framework, i.e. relative.
 - - Justification is based on being at least a slight more good person than bad in order to gain God's acceptance, if there is a God.
 - - There is widespread practice of individual relativism, mainly in the form of materialism, as one's religion, and any formal 'religion' is held loosely and followed intermittently, if at all.
 - - In conclusion, our society is essentially devoid of the misdirected religion of the Jews and the idolatry religions of the Gentiles of that time, and instead has replaced religion with relativism that worships oneself with the supreme priority of acquisitioning things to satisfy self; i.e. the "I" god.
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BIG IDEA: James is essentially saying that his half-brother, Jesus, is not only the Christ but is worthy of being worshipped throughout the world, despite the values and teachings of other religions and cultures.

APPLICATIONS:

- - On a day-to-day basis, does religion have a place in your life, and if so, what role or position does it fulfill?
 - - Is your religion essentially comprised of man-made rules, making you a slave to men's conceptualizations of God?
 - - Or is your religion essentially comprised of idol worship, men's inventions that are used to satisfy a spiritual void in your life?
 - - Or is your religion essentially comprised of self worship, your contrived inventions that you use to justify and support your self-indulgence in whatever you feel like?

 - - Does Jesus have a place in your religion?
 - - And if so, does Jesus hold a prominent position in your religion? Of being God? Of being worshipped? Of being served?

 - - Maybe it's time to diametrically change your regard for Jesus like James did.
 - - Maybe it's time to throw off the worldly values of your upbringing and of your culture.
 - - Like half-brother James decided, maybe it's time to worship and serve Jesus as Lord and God.
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Works Cited:

Bible. "The Holy Bible: New International Version." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

"Strong's Greek Dictionary." *The Bible Library CD-ROM*. Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 1988.

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