

Book of James

Sermon #1: The Difference a Day Makes

James 1:1

Dr. Matt Cassidy, August 21, 2022

Hey, let's look at a passage of Scripture today in the Book of James.

We'll start with this song. I love this love song. It shows how much power there is ... and you wonder, *Can this be true?* It can be true. Listen—"What a Difference a Day Makes."

What a difference a day makes.
Twenty-four little hours
Brought the sun and the flowers
Where there used to be rain.
What a difference a day makes,
And that difference is you.

One day, really? Yes, really. One day, one conversation, one encounter, one moment, can change an entire life. And it has to do with the power of love. And the power of love is able to alter a life in a moment.

And that's what we're going to look at today. We're looking at the Book of James, and James' life is completely revolutionized in a moment.

Who Was James?

And before we look at the teachings of James that are found in the Bible, we're going to look at the man James and see how and why he changed, and then try to apply that to our own lives. That's what we're going to do today.

So, if you look at the man James, you can see that his world, his life, his values, his paradigm—literally, his identity—is altered because of this one moment, this one day. And without this day he wouldn't have written this book and we probably would not even know about him. Again, it's a testament to the power of grace that transforms. And it changed his life.

There's a "before" and "after" James, just like in our lives there will possibly be a before and after.

So, who is James? Who was James? The first thing you need to know is James is the half-brother of Jesus Christ. And so, most scholars will tell you that the person who wrote this book had Mary as his mother and Joseph as his father. He had an unusual insight and understanding of who Jesus is because of that.

Matthew 13:54-56

Coming to His hometown, He began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked. ⁵⁵ "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't his mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? ⁵⁶ Aren't all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?"

There are several passages that mention that James is the half-brother of Jesus. Here's one in Matthew 13: "Coming to His hometown, He began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?' they asked. 'Isn't this the carpenter's sons? Isn't His mother's name Mary, and aren't his brothers James, Joseph, Simon and Judas? And aren't all His sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?'"

So, you can see that he has brothers and sister, and James is quite likely the oldest one.

Now, I know that a number of you have a Catholic background, and the official Catholic catechism will say that Mary was what's called a perpetual virgin—she was a virgin her whole life. And I just want to bring that up and try and explain. That's part of the doctrine of Mary's sinlessness. Mary's sinlessness is taught that she was without original sin and then personal sin, and then underneath that was her perpetual virginity.

Now that doctrine is, first of all, not built on the Bible per se; it's built on the church's desire to make Mary more than she was. And there was another reason that there was a bias there, and the bias is that sex, even in marriage, was not sacred, but rather unclean, necessary, and even a sin, exalting chastity.

So, if Mary were to be sinless she would have to be a virgin her whole life. It's not in the Bible, but it would explain, if that were true, why you never hear of Joseph again after the birth of Jesus. He's just gone. He just goes to work—*I'm out of here*. (First hour loved that joke. Yeah, more coffee.)

But you can see by this passage that James is his brother here, and he has an unusual insight. I wish James had written one of the gospels. He was there in elementary and junior high and senior high school years.

Anyway, Jesus grows up and He becomes a rabbi, which would be great for the family. It was a great family reputation sort of thing. And the family, I'm sure, was proud of Him. But here's the thing. Jesus didn't say He was just a rabbi. As a matter of fact, when He comes home to that area and comes to teach, He says, *I'm the Messiah. I'm the promised one*.

Mark 3:21

And when His own family heard of this, they went out to take custody of Him; for they were saying, "He has lost His senses."

And look how His family reacts in Mark 3: "And when His own family heard this, they went out to take custody of Him"—like, to arrest Him—"and they were saying, 'He has lost his senses.'" Another translation says, "He's out of his mind." His family didn't believe who Jesus said He was.

John 7:5

For not even His brothers were believing in Him.

Look what it says in chapter 7 of John: "For not even His brothers were believing in Him." And that makes sense. Who would doubt more about Jesus' title and claims than His own family members? Because the Messiah—for me—is not supposed to have a brother and a sister.

And so, James had his doubts. It says they weren't believing in Him.

But I bet James even doubted his doubts. Because the way Jesus taught was spellbinding. And He taught with incomparable authority. And Jesus's courage was reckless. He didn't care who He was talking to or offending, whether it was religious leaders or the Roman Empire. And

I'm sure that the peak of the doubts of James about who Jesus said He was crescendoed when Jesus was doing miracles. *What? That's my older brother?*

But his doubts came to fruition. They were all justified when Jesus was crucified. And I'm sure he sat down with his brothers and sisters and said, "I told you this is where it would lead." And there he is.

James 1:1

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.

But something changed in the life of James, something dramatic, something dynamic. His soul was lit on fire. He would live a life of a soul on fire for the love of Jesus. And he would trade in his doubts for great zeal. You can see this in the first sentence when he's addressing the church and introducing himself. James 1:1 says, "James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings."

"Bond-servant of Christ"—Christ is not Jesus' last name. That's an official Jewish title. It means "the Messiah." It means that James has come to the realization that the claims of Jesus are true, that He is who He said He was, that He was the promised one. And this new James is believing now that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promise that God made going all the way back to David, specifically ... actually, to Abraham. No, it goes back to Adam himself. Jesus: it's a fulfillment of Adam and Abraham and Moses, but David—he's all of that. This is the new James. He believes those things to be true.

In the first months of the Church, when it's just getting started, it's James that steps up and becomes the leader of the church in Jerusalem, the only church in the world at that time. As James continues to lead, he gets a reputation, even a nickname, from people inside the Church and outside the Church. His name is "James the just," a man of impeccable character. Ultimately, around 66 A. D., James will be courageously proclaiming the truths about who Jesus is and that will get him in great trouble with religious leaders. And they march him to the southwest corner of the wall, and they push him off that pinnacle into the Kidron Valley one hundred feet below where he will eventually die. He dies a martyr for the claims of Jesus Christ.

Something Changed James

So, James goes from “Jesus has lost His mind” to “Jesus is the promised one” and becomes the leader of the Jerusalem church. He goes from not even showing up for the crucifixion of Jesus to being martyred like all the other apostles. I mean, something changed this man. Someone changed this man.

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the twelve. ⁶ After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all He appeared to me also ...

There’s a difference a day makes, and the difference is you. But it’s not just Jesus. Know this to be true, was that the difference that changed James was not just Jesus. It was a resurrected Jesus that changed James. Look what it says in chapter 15 of 1 Corinthians: “For what I received I passed on”—this is Paul’s recollection of the resurrection of Jesus Christ—“What I received from you I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the promises of Scripture, and then He appeared to Peter and then to the twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep (or died).” Watch this. “Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also ...”

He specifically names James, the half-brother of Jesus. Oh, to watch that happen, right? The Lord Jesus comes to James and says, *Oh, my brother, it’s all true. It’s true—all that I said. I am the promised one. I am.* And James would worship Jesus. And that’s the day that James’ life was changed.

He was transformed by the love of God. He was transformed by the fact that God so loved the world that He gave Jesus to quench the power of sin in his life. That day James realized that Jesus came to die for the sins of James, because only by the blood of Jesus could his sins be forgiven. And Jesus proved it in His resurrection. Yeah, it was a difference a day makes, and the difference was you, but the “you” was a resurrected Jesus. James’s life was altered because of the resurrected Jesus.

And now this new James is going to boldly teach, a lot like Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount. He’s going to be a spokesman for the church in Jerusalem. He’s going to have an impeccable reputation. And he will be proud to die a martyr’s death. That’s the new James.

I mean, it’s a fantastic story, isn’t it? It’s so unique, it’s so special—the half-brother of Jesus, right? But on the other hand, his story is a lot like many stories—actually, millions of stories—throughout the last 2,000 years. His story is unique, but it’s kind of the same. It’s the same in that somebody introduces you to Jesus—a relative or a friend or a co-worker—and you go into it very skeptical with a lot of doubts. And then you start reading. And the more you read the more enamored you become, and it becomes very interesting. And then there’s something in there when Jesus breaks out of the biases we have; the things we think we’ve heard about Jesus and He’s not doing that. He’s more than we could imagine. And then it’s time to choose. It’s time to make a choice. Is Jesus who He said He was?

And then, oddly enough, when you make the choice, when you look back on your life, you realize that the message was being communicated most of your life. You just kind of weren’t listening. Just like James: it was always there, but he didn’t hear.

In my own story, I grew up going to mass, I grew up in a great religious family. And I loved going to mass. I loved all the things that we did that were required of us. To this day I can recite the whole experience. But the problem then was that I just knew the words, but I didn’t know what they meant. I just knew what they said.

And what a difference a day makes. It was a morning in October down at the University of Texas campus, and I was literally on my hands and knees. And I came to the realization that I knew that Jesus had died for sin, I knew that Jesus had died for all mankind, that whoever would believe in Him. But what I came to understand that moment was that Jesus died for me; that His resurrection was proof that only the blood of Jesus could make me right with God. And I had to

take personal responsibility for my sins, and therefore, also take personal responsibility for forgiveness that I was receiving in His righteousness.

And honestly, one of my first reactions was, *Why didn't anyone tell me? Why did I have to wait until I'm twenty years old to find this out?* And I went to mass the next week and it was all there--all the creeds, all the declarations of truth. I wept uncontrollably and kind of caused a scene for the first four times I went back to mass. It was there all the time.

There's a phrase in the Bible for before and after that happens to James and happens to people who have this moment. And that is "born again." You've been born again. It's the before and after James. But a better translation (because it's the same exact Greek word—Jesus is kind of playing with that Greek word) is "born from above." You've been born once naturally from your mother and you will naturally die. And you could be born again supernaturally and you will live for eternity. That's what we're talking about here. It's a new life, a new identity, it's a new nature, a new motive, it's a new purpose in life. And it can happen like that. What a difference a day makes. And the difference is Jesus Christ raised from the dead.

Application #1: What Are You Going to Do with Jesus?

So, the first application—learning the first part of the sentence—is: What are you going to do with Jesus? You have to choose. And for some of you, you know enough to choose. You've heard enough to make a choice. And maybe the difference a day makes—this is that day. Today, choose. Jesus is the Christ. He is the Messiah. He's the one that the promises were made about. He is the hub of all human history. And so, do that. We'll have an opportunity for that in a moment.

But some of you are new to this and there's a lot coming to you fast. I would say, choose to continue to pursue the truth. Keep coming back to church. Let's just have a conversation. But you have to choose to make a choice, because the road leads to a fork where you have to say, *Well, what is it then? It's either the fulfillment of all things promised by God. Is He the hub of all human history?* If so, then He's going to give new meaning to your past. He's going to give purpose to your present. And He's going to give you a promise for eternity. But you have to choose.

And when you choose, you begin a journey with the rest of us as we try to become like Christ in all of life by God's grace. Because only God's grace can transform us.

So, just in summary, the first part here is that James was unique as the half-brother of Jesus. But he's like the rest of us who have come to Christ or will come to Christ, in that he says, "James, the bond-servant of Jesus the Messiah", and it's Jill and Bill and Jackie who are bond-servants of Jesus the Christ. We realize that He is the promised one.

So, what are you going to do with the resurrection of Jesus and His claims to be the Messiah? That's the first part of our application today.

James 1:1

James, a bond-servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings.

Now, this single sentence is loaded, because there's so much more depth to the claims of who Jesus is, and also how James' life is completely altered by it. Look again at the depth of this. I've capitalized different words here. James 1:1—now it says, "James, a BOND-SERVANT of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes who are dispersed abroad, greetings."

"Bond-servant to the Lord"—bond-servant is not a word we use a lot. It means voluntarily becoming a slave. In other words, I say, "I do what I'm told to do." Boy, that rubs us raw, doesn't it? As Americans, as humans ... I do what I'm told to do. It is an absolute surrender of our rights, our freedoms, our values, our preferences, even how I think. I will think the way I'm told to think because I am a bond-servant to the Lord. He is a king, and I do what I'm told.

To be clear, ladies and gentlemen, Christianity is an invitation for us to become a slave to God—a slave. And the prayer that we pray is "Thy will be done" in every area of our life. He owns me. And I do what I'm told.

I'm going to say that being a slave to Christ is the only way Christianity works. I hate to appeal to pragmatism, but I've got to tell you, that's true. Even in the area of the topic of trust; trusting Christ, letting the Holy Spirit guide your life in surrendering to Him, the trust is like repelling. Repelling only works if you trust in the gear. Have you ever done repelling? That's when you're going up a cliff with a rope. It's a lot of fun if you do it the way you're supposed to.

And the way you're supposed to is by completely leaning back all the way. I used to teach this. But some of the people don't trust the gear, and so they lean forward, and they just splat into the wall all the way down. And then they say, "I didn't like repelling." *You didn't repel. You didn't do it, and so it didn't work.*

You know, following Christ as King is like following a recipe. You just do what it says. And so, if you're baking a cake and you say, *I don't want to have an egg in it*, well, do you know what? I don't know what you're making, but it's not going to be a cake. And people do that with their Christianity.

They say, "I didn't like that verse, I don't want to apply that to my life."

"And what? Christianity has left a bad taste in your mouth?"

"It did—how did you know?"

"Because you don't do it. You left out parts that are incremental." Jesus is Lord and we serve the King. That's what it looks like.

And when we have that model of being a bond-slave, a servant, owned by a king, it alters our entire identity. It becomes, believe it or not, the thing that we brag about. Look at James here. He's introducing himself and he's trying to show a little bit of authority here, but he doesn't say, "James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus Christ ..." He doesn't say, "James, the chairman of the Jerusalem Council that absolutely altered the direction of the Church to include Gentiles ..." No. He doesn't say, "James, who had a personal encounter with Jesus and a commission from him ..." Nope. How about this one? Boy, I've seen this one. "James, the senior pastor of the largest church in the world ..." No. This is his ultimate expression of his privilege: "James, a chosen slave to the great King Jesus." That's what he brags about.

Application #2: Are You a Slave and Is Jesus Lord?

And every single person has to come to these two decisions in life. One, what do you make of Jesus saying He's the promised one, the Messiah, the fulfillment of the promises of God and the purpose of mankind. And two, you've got to choose who you're going to be a slave to—a slave to the Lord Jesus. And you make that choice and then you have to keep making it every single day. And you're wondering, *Why would I make a choice to become a slave to Jesus and be directed by the Spirit?* Well, we said it works, but more importantly, what does the passage say

and why does James do that? I'll remind you. Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection is bedrock that proves to us historically that Jesus died and rose again, and He appeared to so many people that it's not crazy to make Him Christ and to make Him Lord and master of your life. Because in the resurrection He proved that He was the boss. He was the boss of life; He was the boss of death. And He ought to be the boss of you.

Why be a slave? It's true. And He proved it and left reckless amounts of evidence to prove it so that you don't feel like you're crazy. Because you could feel like, *I'm crazy to turn over all of my ego*. And we say, "Let's go back to that resurrection." Because the resurrection of life says, *Oh, yeah. Him desiring me to change my entire paradigm in life, letting Jesus through the Bible tell me what is right and what is real and what is true*—that's a rational thing to do when you have resurrection history to back you up.

And when Jesus becomes the king of your life, He invades your vocation and even a vocation choice. He contributes to your relationships. He reinterprets your past. He gives you purpose for your present.

But you have to play your part. Look at it like a script. And you have to read your lines. And do you know what our lines are? The slave. "Thy will be done." Because the part of the King is taken. And as long as we read our lines we'll understand how to live in the kingdom of God. And to be obvious, that's what Jesus taught. There was no bait and switch. When Jesus would teach about the kingdom, of which He was the king, He kind of had an outline. He would tell stories, He'd use illustrations so people could grasp it. And they were usually in two parts. Part one: the kingdom of God—you give everything to it. It's absolute surrender in every aspect of your life. And it's kind of like a pearl dealer, a trade salesman, and he finds the ultimate expression of what pearl-ness is. He sells everything—every single thing to get this pearl. Part one: it costs everything, sell everything, get rid of everything to get the kingdom of God. Part two: they always walk away with joy. They lose everything, but they gain everything. It's an upgrade. It's always an upgrade! It's rational and reasonable to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

Why? Next part: all this other stuff will be added to you. But you can't pursue the other stuff and get the kingdom of God. And so, the outline of the kingdom from the King is you do what you're told, it costs you everything, and you gain eternity in this life and in the next. "Thy will be done." Here's what it looks like. *Thy will be done in every room in our souls and in every*

closet in those rooms and on every shelf in that closet. Thy will be done. You are the King. I'm a voluntary slave and I do what I'm told.

So, choose. Choose what you're going to do, with Jesus being the Messiah, the chosen one, and Jesus being the Lord and we being bond-slaves. He was raised again to prove those two points. He fulfilled the promise to cleanse us of our sin and to show that He's the boss of all creation, the living and the dead.

We get to be humble servants. That's what we brag about. *I'm owned by that owner. I'm a bond-slave to that king. I get to do what I'm told because He has the right to tell me.*

So, what a difference a day makes. And the difference is Jesus, the resurrected Christ and Lord. That's what James is doing in his introduction. And so, let's apply that to our own lives. I'm going to pray in just a few seconds. And in that prayer, some of you, I'm inviting to make Him Messiah and Christ in your life. Let Him die for your sins. Let His resurrection be accounted for your righteousness, because, as we sang, "Nothing but the blood of Jesus" can do that. You're giving up on trying to do good more than you do bad. You're giving up on attending church as though God is calling you His favorite for the week. And you abandon all of that and you say, *Only grace, only a gift from God, His only Son, His death and resurrection, could make me right.*

The second choice is that we're going to pray a prayer, and it's going to be a responsive prayer. Some of you know what this is. I'll help you through this. A responsive prayer—I'm going to mention various topics, and then I'm going to use this buzzword as a transition, a cue, for you. I'll say "Because ..." And when I say, "Because ...", you can say silently, or you can say out loud (it'd be fun if we said it out loud as a church), "I am a bond-servant of King Jesus."

So, I'll say something like, "Thy will be done in every room of my soul, in every closet of that room, and on every shelf in that closet, because ..." And then we'll all say, "I am a bond-servant of King Jesus."

Are you ready? It's time to choose. What a difference a day makes. And today's that day. Let's pray.

Lord, I open up heaven's gate with a giant invitation in this prayer for those members who are listening that have been pursuing You and wondering about You, but now it's time to make a decision. And now they want to surrender their life to You and they want to give You full

custody of their souls. And they realize that while You died for sins of mankind, You died for their particular sin. And it's only through Your death that they could possibly be made right with the holiness of God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So, today is the day they decide, that they receive Your gift and become a member of Your family—a child—a son, a daughter. On this day the adoption papers are signed.

We receive that, Lord Jesus.

*And for some that have chosen to be bond-slaves for Your kingship and then need to regularly do that, today is that day as well; that we pray, “Thy will be done” in every room in our soul, in every closet in that room, on every shelf in that closet. “Thy will be done.” And we do that because ... **I am a bond-servant of King Jesus.***

*Lord, we give you our relationships with people we enjoy, in our marriage with our mate, in dating. And we turn that over to You, not because we live for ourselves, not so that ourselves and our egos and our flesh can be served; but rather so that we could be givers, not takers; that we could be part of helping someone else in a unique way to become like Christ in all of life. And we surrender those values in marriage and dating to You. We do this, contrary to the world around us. But You define what's right and real and true in marriage and dating. And we do that simply because ... **I am a bond-servant of King Jesus.***

*Lord, we surrender our finances to You and our future hope. And we do that because they're not our finances and it's not our future. We are merely slaves, and we get to be slaves. We turn over our resources to You. Open our greedy hands. Help us to become more generous about what is ours and what is not. And we do this because ... **I am a bond-servant of King Jesus.***

*Lord, we turn over our entertainment to You. We feel like we have a right to be entertained and we have a right to choose what our entertainment might be. And that's a lie. Because we do what we're told. Thy will be done—in entertainment. And we do this because ... **I am a bond-servant of King Jesus.***

*Lord, we give over the aspects of our lives, those nooks and crannies that sometimes we think are insignificant: the vocabulary we choose to use, the clothes we choose to wear, the places we choose to frequent. That's all Yours. Let us be guided by Your Spirit in what to say and how to dress and where to go. And we do this simply because it's reasonable and rational with a resurrected king. We do this because ... **I am a bond-servant of King Jesus.***

Lord, let us be a church filled with slaves, proud to be called that. We're owned by the Creator of the universe. That's not so bad. We enjoy this, Lord. Guide and direct us. Give us the courage to obey and enjoy that obedience. And we pray this in Jesus' name—Messiah and King. And everybody said ... Amen.