

# The Heart of James

by Steve Mays

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*The book of James emphasizes the importance of faith in action, demonstrating conduct and character that reflects our faith in God.*

**Duration:** 31:51

**Scripture:** Exodus 14:10-14, Psalm 139:7-10, Luke 23:42-43, James 1:2-4, James 2:14-17, James 3:9-10, James 4:3

**Topics:** "James"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the story of Moses leading the Israelites to the Red Sea. He explains that God brought them into a seemingly impossible situation to show them that the only way through was by relying on Him. The preacher then quotes Matthew 6:1, emphasizing the importance of having pure motives and not seeking recognition from others. He highlights three powerful verses from the New Testament that emphasize the need for righteousness, perfection, and pure motives. The preacher concludes by discussing the importance of having a genuine relationship with God and how it should reflect in our relationships with others.

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## Transcript

Shall we turn in the book of James? Thought I'd do something a little bit different, usually take one verse, but today I'd like to kind of give you the overall picture of the book of James. I think it's one of the outstanding books in the New Testament. And the reason I say that is because of the fact that it was written by James, which was the half-brother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

So after Christ was born, Mary and Joseph had children. John and James were one of those children, and of course, James did not believe in Christ until after the resurrection. But after the resurrection, he became extremely dedicated.

Not only dedicated, but he became a great pillar in the early church. And what I find fascinating about this book is how he teaches it, because it really has to deal with ethics. No doubt, living with Christ and seeing the example of Christ in his own life for 30-some years before he preached, he witnessed just the commitment of Jesus Christ, how he was consistent in every area of his life.

And when you see that pattern, that someone is consistent, there's not a double standard, but what they are is who they really are. It really becomes very powerful within a person's life. And so when you look at the book of James, it's about the ethics.

It has to deal more with conduct than really the character. It has to deal with really the fruit more than even faith. And it deals with probably behavior more than even believing.

Though I am to believe in Jesus Christ, I am also to have a behavior. And when I have the character of Christ and I say that I'm born again, there ought to be a conduct in my life that people see. And when I teach doctrine, it ought to have such a profound effect upon my life that it gives me a responsibility or a duty within my life.

Now, Paul and James went after it two different ways in such a degree that Martin Luther, when he wrote in the 1500s, had a difficult time with this book. In fact, he said that it's a straw of epistles. In other words, it really shouldn't even be in the New Testament.

And the reason why he believed that was such a fervency in his life is because he believed that just shall live by faith. And it was your relationship between God and yourself. And that relationship is built on faith and nothing else.

The man on the cross who died, you remember, he didn't speak in tongues, he didn't go to church, he didn't even become baptized or didn't become a missionary. He simply said, Lord, remember me. And Jesus said, this day you will be with me in paradise, which I believe is what it's all about.

If you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you are saved. In other words, God brought you out, but now he wants to bring you in. James, on the other hand, goes a whole different way.

He says, you say you have faith, then show me the fruit of your life. You say that you have the character of Christ, but I don't see the conduct in your life. I see in chapter three that you gossip and you complain and you murmur and you gripe.

In chapter two, I see that lust is all over your life. You're striving and fighting and causing problems. And then I see in chapter one that you're not happy about the trials and difficulties you're going through.

And then in chapter four, you're not praying as you should as the example of Abraham. And then in chapter five, you're not even looking to Christ. So James now does something really rich.

He talks about ethics. And I guess the best way to say it is that James is saying, show me this relationship and I'll verify this relationship. Paul said, show me this relationship and we can definitely verify this relationship.

So here's how it comes out. If I'm right with God, I'm right with people. But if I'm wrong with God, I am wrong on every area of my life.

If I have this relationship together, then this relationship is going to be great. But if this relationship gets weird, this relationship is going to be hindered. So I'm never going to have the marriage or be the parent or enjoy the business that God desires until I get this relationship back together.

So you can show me conduct and I can show you character. You can show me fruit and I can show you faithfulness to the word of God. So the book of James has to deal with this attitude.

Notice in chapter one, verse one, let me read verses one through four just to kind of set the preference. James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, which is interesting. He's now a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

He yielded his life to the 12 tribes which are scattered abroad. Then in verse two, three, and four, verses we don't like. My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations.

Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. Now underline faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Now let me read that again. These verses are the heart of the whole book. My brethren, count it the joy of your life when you're going through difficult times.

Knowing this, that when you are tried, it's going to bring out patience in your life. And when patience comes, then the work of God is going to take place and it's going to be perfect so much that you're not going to need anything in your life. So I would say that if you are right with God, then you're going to be satisfied with the goodness of God.

But if you're not right with God, you're going to spend a lifetime looking and searching and trying to figure out this God that you want to love. The first thing I need to come to grips with is that God loves me and that God knows me and that God made me. And the Bible says very easily, if I make my bed in heaven, thou art there.

If I make my bed in hell, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, thou art there. In other words, all things are naked and open before whom I have to deal with.

And the word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword and is able to discern the thought and the intent of the heart. So God has the unique ability to look at the motive and the integrity and the honesty of my life. So the conviction of the Holy Spirit and the integrity of the heart is what God's after.

We want the comfort, God wants the character. We want to enjoy our life, God wants to work in our behalf. We wanna blame people and we wanna come to a point that someone else has made me what I am.

God wants me to be like David, against you and you only have I sinned. It doesn't make a difference what happens to the kids or to my wife or to the church. My relationship with God should never move or be swayed in any way at all.

But when I am and when I moved away from my commitment, I make bad decisions in my life and that's what this book begins to teach you. It's interesting that the book of Ephesians, they say is like the Grand Canyon of the New Testament. And the book of Joshua is like the Grand Canyon of the Old Testament.

Ephesians talks about coming into Christ. The book of Joshua talks about coming into the promised land. So in the book of Joshua, you are to enter into that land of milk and honey.

In the book of Ephesians, we are in Christ, we have been predestinated, we have been chosen, we've been taken out of the world and we have been brought into Christ, that's the heart. In this book, it's kind of unique that really the counterpart would probably be Sermon on the Mount. And I wanna share just three verses.

You don't need to turn there, but it's kind of interesting. Jesus one day was talking with his disciples and he was talking about the ethics of the kingdom, which we would call the value or the philosophy of our life. Now don't be afraid.

Paul said, for me to live is Christ and for me to die is to gain. What he was saying is if you keep me alive, I'm gonna preach Christ. If you kill me, I'm gonna be with the Lord.

It's a great way to live your life. In other words, nothing you can do is gonna keep me away from the philosophy that I really believe, the correct belief. Before I lived for everything else.

Paul said it was done. But now for the excellency of the knowledge of God, I'm gonna press towards the mark of the high calling. Everything I've learned, everything I've accomplished, I'm willing to get rid of it that I might be able to apprehend that which I was apprehended for.

And on that Damascus road, Paul was apprehended by God. Now God wants you to know, believe it or not, that he has apprehended your life. He wants your life.

And the reason why is because he made you and there's a purpose and there's a destiny within your life. The book of Ecclesiastes tells me that God put eternity within all of our hearts. So that uneasiness, that conviction of the Holy Spirit is to push me towards God, to seek to find fulfillment in the things of God, not in the things of the world.

Jesus said, if you drink of this well, you're gonna thirst again. But if you drink of my kingdom, you're never gonna thirst again. So God is seeking to bring peace and joy in the midst of your life.

But he says in Matthew in chapter five, verse 20, for I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of God. Now, very carefully, remember who he's talking to. He is speaking to the disciples and he has now shattered their life.

He is saying in effect that unless you can get higher than the religious people of the day, unless you can rise above any church and become like Christ, you're never gonna make it into the kingdom of God. And what they were doing, the disciples, is they looked at the religious ethics or the religious people of that day. And they were Pharisees and they were scribes and they were boasting, but God looked and saw that they did not love God.

They loved who they were more than they loved the things of God. They loved the places that were high, but they didn't love the things that were of the kingdom of God. And Jesus now is making a point, a very important point, that unless my righteousness exceeds, I'm not gonna enter the kingdom of God.

Let me give you another one, I'll explain. In Matthew 5, 48, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father, "which is in heaven, is perfect." Right there, timeout, Pastor Steve. No one's perfect, I agree.

I try to tell my wife, but she won't agree with me. There's no one perfect, not at all. Not a good, perfect sermon, nothing.

You say, well, what he's talking about? He's talking about faith. Faith in God will do something in your life that it will make you right with God, and God will begin to bring a maturity about your life. If you're seeking to live your life apart from God, or you're seeking to live your life, listen, apart from faith, and you try to make everything perfect and try to keep everything together, you're gonna fall apart.

The only way you can handle life is by faith in God, that God has to come inside of you. God has to give you the strength. And as Moses declared in Deuteronomy, "As my day is, so shall my strength be." God

wants you to understand something very vivid.

When he took Moses to the Red Sea, why did he bring Israel into a trap? Not that he would embarrass them, but he would prove to them that the only way through was by God. And so the difficulties are for your opportunity to see God. Let me read one more verse and I'll explain it all.

In Matthew 6, one, take heed that you do not your alms before men, integrity, motive, to be seen of them. Otherwise, you have no reward for your father, which is in heaven. Three powerful verses in the New Testament.

Number one, your righteousness has to go higher. Number two, you need to be perfect as your father is in heaven. Number three, if your motive is not pure, it doesn't count.

At that point, you wanna quit, amen? I just think that's it. That's exactly what God wants you to understand. In other words, you in your best day can't do it.

So what do we do? Jesus Christ came into your life. He is now the strength and the encouragement of your life. When God looks at you, he sees the righteousness of Christ.

It's not how good you are or what you've done. It's who Jesus Christ is and him crucified. So there's no condemnation for them that are in Christ Jesus.

Who is going to separate us from the love of God? Who is going to bring any guilt into our lives? In other words, in Christ, I am forgiven. Number two, how am I gonna be perfect? You're never gonna be perfect. But by faith, God is going to give you the ability to trust God.

In trusting God, you're gonna please God. When you please God, he's going to reward you and make even your enemies be pleased with you. The moment you decide to trust God in your marriage, God begins to work.

The moment you trust God with those kids, God begins to speak to those kids' hearts. In other words, the perfection is not works, is not yourself. The perfection is understanding that God has the capacity to change anything at any time.

Thirdly, unless I understand my motives are not pure, it's by the value of Christ that I begin to live for the glory of God. This is so important. I go home, I live a double standard.

I come to church, I live one way. Go home, live another way. Go to work, they don't even know I'm a Christian.

And I would like maybe to go to your job and just stand next to the person you've worked with for 10 to 15 years and say to that person next to you, do you know that so-and-so's a Christian? You gotta be kidding me. I didn't know that. And I would say to you, well, why don't they know that you're a Christian? Well, shh, no.

Conduct and character has to be the same. If your conduct, now listen, if your conduct is not evident, it's because the character is flawed. And the character is flawed because it's more important what people think than what God thinks.

And when I'm into pleasing God, my character's gonna change and I really don't care what the world thinks. I'm gonna live for the glory of God. So my children are gonna see consistency in the pulpit at home.

My guys on staff are gonna see the same person here, out there. My wife is gonna have the same person. That's the key of your life.

So James is saying, very simply, show me the conduct. And so notice, if you would, in verse three. Now this, that trying of your faith, work of patience.

And notice verse four, it's so powerful. But let patience have her perfect work. How? That ye may be perfect and tire wanting nothing.

So the righteousness is what God's after. Now I just wanna share a couple things, very important things for you to try to get tuned into. Number one, you need to understand that God is with you.

Some of you have come to a point that you feel that God wants to hurt you or that God takes things away from you. The best way to say it is that if you saw your kid playing with a razor blade, would you take it out of their hand? Yes. Would that child cry? Yes.

Why? Because you've taken something out. Well, why did God take it away from you? Why would God want that out of your life? Because it's gonna hurt you. And the Bible declares that he's a jealous God.

You remember the life of Jonah. I can't think of a better way to explain this. The life of Jonah, he was called by God, like we are.

But he didn't want what God wanted. He didn't want to be a prophet that got Assyria into heaven. So he went down to Tarshish.

He ran away from God. To show you the goodness of God, what did God do? He sent the wind, he sent the storm, he shook the boat, and he even what? Created the fish. Why? Because God knew that they were gonna throw him over and God wanted to catch this guy.

What did God do with him? He ate him up. No. He took him and all the way over, free ticket to where? Nineveh.

That's where God wanted him. Now he could have gone the first time with no seaweed, no throw up on him. He could have gone just first time.

But oh no, like us. Nope, can't do that. I'm gonna do what I want.

Oh, not living by faith. Nope, don't wanna go there. And the reason why is he did not want God to save him.

And he said to God, you are a God of mercy. I'm gonna walk in, share Christ, they're gonna be in heaven. My reputation, ah.

My reputation? My, what about God's reputation? Ah, interesting. My business, what about God's business? My, what about God's marriage? My, what about God's children? You see, everything that you have, God's given. God gave you the mind, God gave you the heart, God gave you the skills, God gave you the people, God gave people around you that believe in you.

All that God wants you to know is that God is for you, not against you. So by taking Jonah, what did he do? He brought him back into the will of God. And he was teaching us a valuable lesson that in that horrible trial of the winds and the storms and the sea, people losing everything, that God was in it for one reason and one reason only, to save this man.

And I believe that the trials in your life are for one reason and one reason only, to bring you to the evident of who you are. What do I mean? God, I trust you, I really love you. Oh, you do, Stephen? I really do, God, this is cool.

Okay, someone cuts in front of me, I'm gonna take them out, I wanna kill them. What about that anger? Oh, I don't have no anger. Well, what was that right there? Well, that's not important.

Or someone says something to me and in my heart, I'm almost cussing. Where did that come from? What are you talking about? Stephen, I live inside of you. I know how you think.

I know what you're thinking. You remember, you're the guy that used to shoot at people and you're the guy that used to go crazy. Now, you say that you're all together.

Well, I'm doing pretty good. Reading the Bible, loving God. Well, let's just see how good you're really doing.

So I come home and my wife is having a tough day and she says, it really hurts me. And so I exploded. Oh, patience.

How are you doing? Not real well. And so all of a sudden, we begin to talk and voices begin to rise and I hear God say, humble yourself. I'm not gonna humble myself, she started it.

Oh, so you're being led by the spirit, huh? And I'm just sitting here going, why is it always me? Why can't you pick on the neighbors next door? Why are you always picking these people right here, right now? You ever feel like God's just picking on you? You gotta be thankful. You ought to be so thankful because there's a lesson. You see, in your mind, you are together and God knows you're together, but you're saying that you're living by faith, but God has to prove that.

He has to test that. So we bring something in your life that is so overwhelming that you begin to question. Your life is shattered.

You're shaken to the core. Martha said, if you would have been here, my brother would have never died. Where were you? Things happen.

Maybe a job. Maybe you're not promoted. Maybe someone's hurt you.

Maybe a boyfriend's broken up. Maybe the business didn't work out. Maybe the wife and you are having a difficult time.

Something is shattering your life. Are you rejoicing? Nope. Are you happy? Not at all.

Are you looking to God? Not in your life. What are you thinking about leaving God? Okay, now we're honest. Now there's integrity.

This is what's in the heart. So God wants you to understand. Why? Because one day, Satan could come after me and he can set me up.

And if I'm so prideful and deceptive about how great I'm doing, I could fall. God doesn't want me to fall. God wants me to know who I am.

God wants me to yield to him. And so I believe it's not the church or it's not my wife or it's not the kids. It's me.

And the faith that this book is going to teach us is that God will give you the strength to button up. God will give you the strength to turn away from lust. God will give you the strength to bow your knee and begin to pray everything that is contrary.

Let me tell you a little story, true story. A guy who was not walking with God, his wife really loved the Lord. She tried to witness to this guy over and over again.

He got worse and worse as they got older in life. They had been married a lot of years. Again, true story.

She would go to incredible lengths putting tracks in the toilet paper. That would bum me out. If I didn't know Christ and I had to use the restroom and I pulled the toilet paper and there was a track, that would bug me.

She even put a track between the lettuce and the sandwich, hoping that he would read it. It just drove him further and further away. She wanted to go to church, it bugged him.

Finally, she came to a counselor or a pastor and said, I need help. And so this wise man said to her, so tell me, what does your husband like? And she looked him right in the eyes and said, my husband loves split pea soup, but I hate it and I will not do it. And the pastor said, you go home and make him split pea soup.

She goes, I will not. And he said, you will. So on her way home, she fought with God.

She came by the market, passed it, turned around, came back, passed it, turned around. She finally bought the ham. She came home and she opened every window with an attitude.

Bam, bam, bam. Got the fans and put this thing on. All day, it stunk the house up.

She couldn't stand it. He walked in. The moment he opened the door, he cried for his wife.

Honey, where are you? I'm right here. What happened? What do you mean what happened? I made you sit. No, no, no, no.

What happened to you? What do you mean what happened? Whatever changed you, I want. He accepted Christ right then. Now why? Because she jammed a track down his throat? Because she put a track on a sandwich? Because she beat him at night with a Bible when he was sleeping? No.

What brought him to Christ? Something happened inside of her. I'm gonna love him. I'm gonna die to myself.

I'm gonna walk a second mile. I'm gonna be like Christ. I'm gonna surrender.

I'm gonna humble myself. And the moment he saw Christ in her, he came to Christ. Let's bring it home.

Could it be it's not the church that has driven your kids away? They don't see Christ in your life. Could it be that it's not the schools? It's Christ not in our lives that they don't see? They hear about all the problems with the church and all the problems with Christian people, but they don't see Christ and him crucified. And when it comes to ethics, we're talking about conduct.

And when it comes to this whole life, we're talking about the life of Daniel, that he went from kingdom to kingdom to kingdom. And here's why. Because they knew that they would have no loss.

He had an excellent spirit. When it came to Daniel, he purposed in his heart conduct. And when the conduct's there, it's because the character's there.

And when the conduct is not there, when God doesn't see it, he wants to change your character. And because he loves you so much, and me, he just says, Stephen, it's time for us to see how you're gonna respond. And so I believe that God allows things in your life to test you.

And I think it's to make you and to mold you into the people that when others see your life, they're gonna say, so what's different? I'll end up with a interesting story. I think it's one of the best in the New Testament. Paul did not wanna go on the ship, you remember? He went on the ship.

He had to, he was a prisoner. He told them, don't go, we're gonna crash. They wouldn't listen, they went.

They got all the way to Malta, you remember? And they sunk. And I've told you before, I think this is where surfing really started. The Bible says every man grabbed a board.

Every man grabbed a board, went in. Okay, now check this story out. Who was the one picking up the wood? Who was the prisoner? Paul.

He didn't have an attitude. I told you not to go. Well, we sunk.

I told you I didn't wanna go. I'm not gonna serve, and I'm not mad. He wasn't mad.

They looked around, and they realized, hey, the gods are going to deal with you, Paul. He picked up the wood and was bit, you remember, by a viper. Now everyone around that fire said, it says right there in the New Testament, they knew that he was in trouble with God because the storm didn't kill him, but the viper's gonna kill him.

What did Paul do? He shook it off. It's a great story. He just shook it off.

Someone stabs you in the back, shake it off. Your kids run away, shake it off. Husband says something hurt you, you gotta shake it off.

When he didn't die, this is the greatest thing the King James, it says, they changed their minds. That's so powerful. Why are people not changing their minds around us? Because they don't see it.

We get stabbed, oh, be careful, I hate this church. Someone bumps into our, but I hate this church. No one said anything.

You can shipwreck me, but here's the story. You missed the whole story. Paul would have never gone to Malta.

Too big, too small, but God wanted him to go to Malta. The only way Paul would go to Malta is God had to sink that ship. No other way.

It was so important to God for him to go to that island. God went out of the way to sink that ship. When he got on, he brought them all to Christ and he changed their minds.

So tell me, could it be that the things that happen to me are in order to happen in me so things can happen through me? So maybe this wife or maybe this kid or maybe this boyfriend or maybe this broken relationship or maybe this job, maybe it really is from God. And maybe God's just waiting for me to surrender and say, okay, I'm gonna have joy. And when I have the joy and I have Christ, every relationship is gonna change.

If this is weird, I can never fix this. If I just please him, everything's fixed, amen? Amen.

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