

James - the Lord's Brother

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the life of James, the Lord's brother, highlighting his initial doubts and the transformative power of the Resurrection in shaping his faith and leadership.

Scripture: John 7:5, Acts 12:17, Acts 15:13, Acts 21:18, 1 Corinthians 15:7, Galatians 1:18-19

Topics: "Faith and Doubt", "The Power of Resurrection"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the life of James, the Lord's brother, emphasizing how his close proximity to Jesus did not lead to belief until after the Resurrection. He highlights the challenges James faced due to his practical mindset, which prioritized success and tangible results over spiritual depth. Despite his eventual leadership in the early Church, James is portrayed as a 'halfway Christian,' struggling to fully embrace the implications of the Resurrection and remaining tied to Jewish traditions. Sparks warns against the limitations of a faith that does not fully engage with the transformative power of the Resurrection, urging believers to seek a deeper spiritual understanding. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a balance between practicality and spirituality, rooted in the true essence of Christ's resurrection.

Transcript

Read: John 7:5; 1 Cor. 15:7; Gal. 1:18,19; Acts 12:17, 15:13, 21:18.

Let us remind ourselves of the particular object that we have in view in this message on Horizons. We are pointing out that Resurrection - the Resurrection of Christ - sets the sphere within which, and by which, everything in the New Testament is governed. Resurrection pre-supposes death, but Resurrection is more than resuscitation (which was the case in the 'sign-raisings' of the physically dead, both in the Old and New Testaments). Resurrection, as differing from resuscitation, carries with it an absolute difference in character and spiritual position. Therefore Resurrection, both in the case of Christ, and in that of believers in relationship with Him, involves a test, a challenge, a demand, and a possibility.

In order to understand this, and all the teaching of the New Testament regarding believer's union with Christ in death and resurrection, we are looking at some of the people most closely in touch with Him before and after the Cross. We are seeking to see what Resurrection required where they were concerned. It is evident that it did mean something very drastic in them, but the measure of that effect varied in the different cases, although it was meant to be utter in every one. So we come to the next in the group -

James - The Lord's Brother

As in each previous case we are to find our clue by identifying his human type. You should have carefully read the Scriptures which we have given at the head of this consideration, for it is they which lead to the verifying of our conclusions.

It is far from easy to delineate the category of James without doing injury to the very real values of that category, and, while it is so necessary to show how much the demands of Resurrection apply to this type, we shall certainly seek to be both fair to, and appreciative of, those values.

We must remember that James lived with his brother Jesus in Nazareth for nearly thirty years. That is a long time to be at such close quarters with an elder brother. After that he was never far away from Jesus during the three and a half years of His ministry and work. Then he was somewhere not remote from Jesus during the scenes of the trial and crucifixion.

Upon those thirty three and a half years with all that they held the verdict as to James is that he did not believe in his brother Jesus. No more terrible verdict could ever be passed in the light of everything that was true, and what an 'everything' it was!

This needs explaining and the explanation can be largely found in the kind of person that James was. That kind or type is not difficult to identify, for it is the largest category of all, and it is all around us. There is one word that defines and explains it, and into that word all the truly good and the truly perilous is gathered. That word is the word 'practical'.

It sounds good; yes, and it so largely is, but if you have already found James a big question and problem, it is because of this particular constitution. Let us analyse it.

Firstly, the people of this 'Practical' category are the people for whom success is the criterion of everything. They will reserve their confidence until they are sure that you are going to make a success of life, and be a success yourself. If you are successful according to their ideas and standards you will be accepted and trusted. If you are not a success - as they judge success - then they have no place for you and nothing will substitute this with them. They will just not believe in you. No doubt there was plenty in the nature, behaviour, and disposition of Jesus in Nazareth that was not of that tough and forceful and 'practical' (?) kind that James believed was necessary to position and power, and this made him definitely apprehensive and reserved as to Jesus and as to what kind of a success He would be in the world.

But when it came to the period of public life, every reserve was - as he believed - justified, and all his natural susceptibilities were offended. This category is the one which is absolutely unwilling to jeopardize position, prestige, and standing, especially where the top people are concerned. It will suspect and mistrust the common people's reactions, and only be influenced by the attitude of 'the people who count and matter'. The way that Jesus was taking was positively dangerous and completely contrary to all 'success' where the 'high-ups' were concerned. From his own standpoint and according to his own standards the judgment of James was quite correct; Jesus was 'riding for a fall', and the end of His life would have 'failure' written large over it. His whole course was - in spite of the temporary popularity - dangerous to success!

We leave the question as to whether Jesus was - from Heaven's standpoint - really a failure. There are some 'failures' which are immense successes.

Secondly, this category consists of those who seriously lack imagination. They just cannot see beyond what they would call 'present hard facts'. Everything for them lies on the surface, and what is to them 'obvious' is the last argument. Their watchword being 'Be practical', they are intolerant of the 'spiritual' and what they would (wrongly) call 'mystical', and 'up in the clouds'. For them the hard facts are the immediate or short-term results. Yes, 'results' are more important than how you get them: get results, that is what matters. Policy is more than principle with them. Get your end and don't worry too much as to how.

The result is very often a cold cruelty; insensitive to the feelings of others. The finer elements of sympathy, kindness, consideration, and even courtesy do not occur to them to be important or indispensable. They have a 'blind-spot' where the sensitive feelings of others are concerned. They are strangers to true imagination, and foes of what they interpret that word to mean. Their idea of imagination is that it means conjuring up pictures - mental pictures - which are unreal and impossible, whereas true imagination is the faculty which enables one to place himself in circumstances which demand understanding.

The 'practical' makeup can crush down anything which gets in the way of its set purpose, and ride rough-shod over friendship, family relationships, and all that is deemed competitive. It is the temperament of commerce and commercialism.

Of course, the intensity of the temperament varies in different individual cases. Some are softer and kindlier than others, but, nevertheless, the disposition is more or less a distinct one.

There are paradoxes and anomalies in this category. Full of activities of real value, service of necessity, and hard-working - often sacrificial - labours, without which the world would be a desolate place, they - at the same time - cannot stay to go beneath the surface, and are impatient with those who do. We just must have our Marthas as well as our Marys or we might not get our dinner, but a balance of the two would make the ideal, whereas Martha before Resurrection thinks that everybody ought to be a Martha and that Mary is a time-waster and not 'practical'.

We go on. This type is that which holds things with an iron hand and will never let go unless forced to do so by being completely frustrated. It is marked by a superiority of judgment. Seldom do they know what they do not know. Indeed, they can do things better than anyone else, and they find it the most difficult function in the orchestra to play 'second fiddle', while often they are not qualified to do otherwise.

While this is a general and by no means exhaustive delineation of this particular category of human nature, it is sufficient for us to delineate the natural class to which James, the Lord's brother, belonged.

Up to the Crucifixion of Jesus, James was evidently rigidly true to type, and was definitely an unbeliever in the deity and Messiahship of his brother (John 7:3-5). At some time - probably late - in the forty days after the Resurrection, Jesus made a personal appearance to James (1 Cor. 15:7). Thereafter James comes into view as holding a prominent position in the Church in Jerusalem, firstly as equal with Peter, and then, as Peter moved out to wider ministry (which James seems never to have done), James takes leadership there.

All the relevant references need to be read, but a very significant statement occurs in Galatians 2:12: "...certain came from James", with serious immediate effects - even with Peter.

There is no question as to the conversion of James regarding the Person of Jesus. His Letter has such statements as: "James, a bondservant of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:1), "...our Lord Jesus Christ" (2:1); and

"...the coming of the Lord" (5:7,8).

As we have said, there are things of great importance in his Letter and it is not a matter of either rejecting or discounting them. But - and it is a very big 'but' - we can only feel that there was an element of tragedy in James. The Cross and the Resurrection went no further than halfway into the constitution of James, and therefore we have to regard him as for ever a halfway Christian. He kept one foot in Judaism and the other in Christianity, playing for safety. He always maintained a 'go slow' policy over extra-Jewish expansion. He cautioned care in opening the door to what was not of the tradition; what was not the 'established order'; to any innovation or change. His influence kept a large part of the Church in Jerusalem in fear and bondage. Dr. Alexander White has some rather strong things to say about James in his Bible Characters.

But our purpose is to show one thing. If the Cross and the nature of Resurrection-life do not go more than half-way into our natural constitution, while our 'Fundamentalism' or 'Evangelicalism', our personal faith and devotion to the Lord Jesus may be unquestionable, we may yet be a spiritual tragedy.

Do think of all that James was associated with: thirty years of the closest contact with Christ; three-and-a-half years of His ministry, teaching, and work; a personal witness and experience of the risen Lord, and Pentecost! But - he had never seen the immense universal significance of that One. The apprehension of Stephen and Paul was almost foreign to him, and he found no difficulty in holding things locally into a set, historic mould. 'Heavenliness', 'Spirituality', 'Universality', such like terms as are characteristic of Paul and John are not the vocabulary of James, indeed they are suspect.

Were it not that we are familiar with this tragedy in our own time we would not have believed it possible. To have so much and be so limited; to have been so closely in touch with greater fulnesses and then to show that we have not really seen their meaning and reality. To be so full of devotion, of good works, of sacrificial service, but that people should meet so little of the Lord Himself in us, and that our effect should be to limit the Lord rather than magnify Him, this surely is tragedy.

It would seem that the real explanation was that James had never been really broken. He remained intact. The devastation and desolating which came on Paul, and in a lesser degree on Peter, never was allowed to get through the frigid soul of James. We value so much in what he wrote and recognize the great importance of practicality in the Christian life. We cannot do without this contribution. We see the beauty of the Bethany home when, through sorrow, suffering, death, and resurrection, the friction has gone and Mary and Martha are complementary and adjusted, both necessary.

James holds a warning, it is a historic warning. The slogan: 'Back to Jerusalem', if that means back to the Jerusalem of James, may mean back to limitation, back to the static and legal.

Dr. Campbell Morgan had very real insight when he said in his lectures on 'Acts ' (chapter 8:1-13):

'The martyrdom of Stephen created a crisis in the history of the Church. In reading the Acts, we find that from this point onward Jerusalem is no longer the centre of interest. It almost fades from the page. This is not loss; but great gain. When Jerusalem ceases to be the centre of interest, the record does not suffer in any way, nor does it reflect upon Jerusalem. The local, the temporal, the material, are of little importance in the Church of God. The universal, the eternal, the spiritual are supreme. It was of the very spirit of an old and past economy to fasten upon a geographical centre, and to depend upon material symbols. The Church now moves out on the great pathway of her victorious business, independent of Jerusalem. This is the supreme revelation of this book of the Acts of the Apostles. Not easily did they learn the lesson, for the

Apostles clung to Jerusalem, but the great spiritual movement, independent of Jerusalem... went forward; not slighting Jerusalem, not unmindful of Jerusalem, nor careless of its past history and early contribution, but far more influenced by the vision of Jerusalem from on high, the mother of us all... No longer hampered by localities and temporalities, the surging spiritual life of the Church swept them all away, and quietly and majestically on to new quests and new triumphs. Church failure has invariably resulted from an attempt to check that spiritual movement which is independent of locality, and of all things material. Whenever the Church is governed from Jerusalem, or Rome, or from anywhere other than from Heaven, it is hindered and hampered and prevented from fulfilling the great function of its life.'

There is no doubt that the book of the 'Acts' is the record of an essentially spiritual movement, but who will say that it is not practical. The truly spiritual is really practical and the rightly practical should be truly spiritual. These things should not be confused. But the adjustment and balance will only be found on Resurrection ground where the Cross has deeply touched our natural life, correcting its disorder, and establishing that true government of the Holy Spirit - the disposition of Christ.

Take all that James has to offer, but recognize that there is vastly more when "the power of his resurrection" is ever going deeper. The 'horizon' of resurrection is a very great one.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/james-the-lords-brother/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net