

## Family Talk

Endurance-Part 7

*Conclusion of James*

Today we come to the end of our study through the Book of James.

I wanted to take advantage of this last opportunity to do a couple of things. First, I wanted to go back and review some of the key points and principles found in this letter sort of as a fly-over.

We've dealt with each individual text and have put them under our microscopes dealing with individual verses and individual words, but I want to step back and take a broader look at the truths presented in this letter.

And then, secondly, I wanted to tell you about the death of James and tell you something today that no expositor has been able to do until just a few years ago . . . we'll get there a little later on.

Now there's a word that appears throughout James' letter that shows us his heart and passion and protective nature.

I'm going to let that phrase serve as an outline for our fly-over today.

It's the word, *brethren*. It'll appear around 15 times throughout this letter. It's a term of family affection and connection.

The Greek word, adelphoi (αδελφοι) translated brethren, would have been inclusive, unless context dictated otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, in the context of his audience, James would have been using the word to refer to all the believers in the assembly.

Translated into our modern vocabulary, it would read, "Brothers and sisters." In fact, James would often use the possessive pronoun, "my" my brothers and sisters, to express great love and affection.

Even when James gets on to them and to us it is couched in family terminology.

That's one of the reasons James shoots so straight. This is family talk. He's talking to his children in the faith.

You see, there are things I'd never tell the neighbor kids that I'd tell my kids. There were things that I would allow from neighbor kids that I'd never allow from mine.

You won't tell that kid in the booth next to yours in the restaurant to put his napkin in his lap . . . to chew with his mouth closed . . . would you? I hope not.

They're not a part of your family, but your kids are different. You talk straight to them from a to z.

I love the story where one little boy was talking to his friend and he told them, "I'm worried about my parents." The other kid said, "Why?" He said, "Well, my dad works really hard every day so I won't need anything and he's saving money for my car and my education, and my mom works really hard every single day washing and cleaning and cooking so that I'm taken care of and I'm worried about 'em." The other kid said, "What do you gotta worry about?" He boy responded, "I'm afraid they might try to escape."

Maybe some of you are thinking thoughts lately of escaping.

There are some kids in my cul-de-sac that I hear nearly every Saturday and sometimes after school. They're all kids in the same family, and I have heard them for literally hours on end out in their yard yelling at each other . . . arguing with each other at the top of their lungs. I'm several houses away; I'm in my study, and I can hear it all.

There have been times when I've been close to getting up from my study chair to go outside in fact, one time I got as far as the front door and I even opened it . . . I didn't do anything, but I was really tempted to go out on the front porch and yell up the street, "Be quiet . . . I'm working on a sermon in here!"

It's on patience! So stop it right *now*, but I didn't. Why? They're not my kids.

In fact, they don't come to church here. I haven't invited them. I don't have the courage.

James tells us what to do doesn't he? He's walked right into our front yard and then into our living room, and before we can even think to ask, "Who do you think you are?" he says, "I happen to be your brother."

He pulls up a chair in front of the fireplace, and he's gathered all of us around him. Yes, there are times when he slaps his knee in frustration and pounds his fist on the arm of the chair in righteous indignation and shakes his finger in our face.

But if we've understood this letter correctly, we shouldn't have the idea that James is saying, "Let me tell you a thing or two."

No, it's more like, "Listen, you have to get this right. We've got to live out our faith. Everybody in this family needs to grow up and live right. We are in this thing together as a family."

You see, James has the right to talk to us this way because this letter is addressed over and over again, to "my brothers and sisters" in the family of God.

What I've done is I've gone back through each instance when James refers to the brethren and I've summarized them into several different subjects. I don't have time to review all of them, but I'll at least give you the categories.

We'll take a closer look at some of them to make sure we got the point of this family talk.

### **1. James delivers family talk about trials**

James began his letter by saying in chapter 1 and verse 2, *Consider it all joy, my brethren—my brothers and sisters—when you encounter various trials.*

In that one sentence, James cut right to the chase and tells us the truth about trouble.

Trouble is inevitable. He didn't say, "If you encounter various trials, but *when*."

And he also says they come in various sizes and shapes. The word various, for various trials, is literally multicolored.

Listen, you don't just deal with one problem as a Christian—you multi-task problems. Trials are not only inevitable and unlimited, they are also unexpected.

The word for encounter has the idea of suddenness; added to that idea is the dramatic use of the word for *trials* here in *verse 2*.

It's the Greek word that gives us our word for pirates. Unexpected pirates arrive. The idea here is

that you've suddenly become surrounded by pirates. They have swooped down on your ship.

You are unarmed, unprepared, unsuspecting, and James says, consider it all joy, that is, count it a joyful thing to suffer.

What does he mean? Well, what he doesn't mean is that trials are happy things. He isn't saying, put on a happy smile and offer all those pirates sweet tea and cookies.

He's saying to face your tribulations with the perspective that God whom you serve has allowed them to board your ship in order to shape your character up . . . to that of Christ's.

Satan wants trials to defeat us. God uses trials to develop us.

You don't get to pick which ones you'll deal with—God does that for you, but you do get to pick the attitude with which you'll respond to them.

So James says to his family . . . listen, you don't get to choose your crosses, but you do get to choose your responses.

You can't choose your cross; you can choose your response.

That's family talk about trouble.

### **2. James delivers a little family talk about temptation.**

In *verse 13 of chapter 1* James again writes with the realism of the Christian experience.

Again, it isn't *if* you experience temptation, but *when*.

James goes on to describe the downward spiral from temptation to lust to sin to destruction.

Every day you get out of bed in the morning you need to know you will face a test of integrity, honesty, and purity.

Temptation is never ever going to leave you alone.

### **3. In verse 19, James gives us a family talk about truth**

Responding to truth, James writes, we should be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger.

The context is our response to the truth of scripture. We should be quick to hear it, slow to talk back to it, and slow to get angry with it.

It's simply a mirror reflecting who we really are.

So get over it . . . submit to it . . . confess in light of it . . . respond to it . . . and live by it.

**4. James then delivers some family talk about favoritism in chapter 2.**

Notice *verse 1. My brethren, do not hold your faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ with an attitude of personal favoritism – or partiality.*

In other words, don't be a snob. Social cliques, status, favoritism, racism and classism have nothing to do with genuine Christianity.

There's no such thing in the church as who's who and who's not. That's not how brothers and sisters are supposed to act. James writes in *verse 5, "Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters; did not God choose the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man.*

You brought the classism and racism and favoritism of the world inside the church.

This is where James gets a little fired up in his family talk. Listen that may be the way it is out there, James says, but that's not the way it's going to be in here. The church is to be the place where cultural norms are toppled by the gospel of grace.

The truth is, we're all a bunch of nobodies who've been saved by Somebody, and it's our desire to see that He is exalted by everybody. That's family talk on favoritism.

**5. There's family talk on faith in chapter 2 and verse 14 where James shocks us all over again by telling us that demons have faith – verse 19.**

James delineates the differences between dead faith which is words without works; and demonic faith which is acknowledgment without acceptance; and then dynamic faith which is belief plus behavior.

You see, James wants us to demonstrate that we're not only growing older in the faith, we're growing up in the faith.

**6. James gave us quite a family talk on our tongue, didn't he?**

In fact, he talks to his brothers and sisters about speech more than any other subject beginning in verse 1 of chapter 3 and even into chapter 5 and verse 12 where he challenge us to make sure our yes meant yes and our no meant no.

**7. Then he encouraged his brothers and sisters as he gave a family talk on patience.**

In *chapter 5* he took us to the farm and showed us the patience and perseverance of a farmer who does everything he can do and then trusts the Lord to do what only God can do.

Patience is not apathy; it's action. Patience requires repetition remember? No farmer ever planted one crop and said, "There that takes care of it for life."

No . . . you do the right things over and over again. You fertilize your spiritual walk with prayer; you plant in your heart the seeds of God's truth; you share your faith with others; you serve the body; then you resist the temptation to say, "Okay Lord, I did that!"

The Lord says, "Go and do it again." That is the development of Biblical patience.

**8. Lastly, James gave us a family talk on the pursuit of prodigals in verse 19 of chapter 5.**

This is the hard hitting truth of turning a sinner from his ways, delivering the truth of sin and repentance in love to the wayward, reminding them of the danger of their error, all the while understanding that the prodigal is in danger of an early death or at least a death-like, empty life.

So you warn them and when they repent you forgive them, and with that, as quickly as James started, he finished. And that's the end of the letter.

But it's not the end of James personal testimony.

You see, every once in a while the archeologist's spade will unearth something particularly meaningful to a biblical character or setting.

One of the most remarkable discoveries in modern history largely ignored by society at large was the discovery a few years ago of an ossuary.



The word, ossuary, simply means, in easier terms, bone box. It looked like a miniature coffin carved out of limestone with a removable lid, also carved from limestone.

Once a deceased person's body had returned to dust after a year or so the family would take his skeleton, polish the bones and place them in an ossuary.<sup>ii</sup>

Had our Lord not risen from the dead, after a year or so, he would have been taken off the ledge where he laid in that borrowed cave/tomb, unwrapped, his bones cleaned and placed in an ossuary.

Of course, there will never be the discovery of the ossuary of Christ because He rose from the dead.

Regardless of Israel's attempt to sell the story that the disciples had stolen the body, the body was never found and neither were his bones. There was and is no ossuary for the bones of Jesus Christ.

What's even more interesting about the use of ossuaries including the one you see here, brought into the public eye in 2002, was the fact that archeologists and historians have revealed to us that the use of an ossuary only lasted for a short period of time.

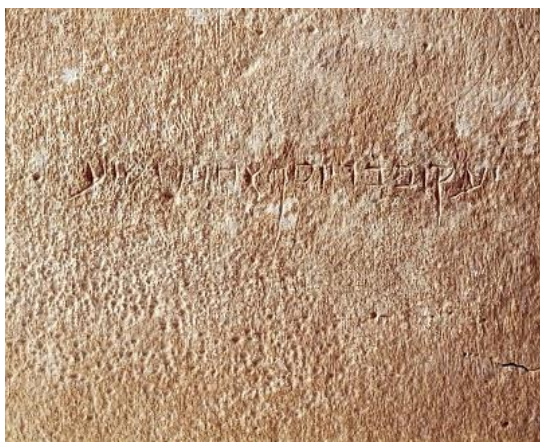
It was a passing fad, so to speak. The more wealthy you were, the more ornate the ossuary.

We know from history that the Jewish people began this practice about 25 years before the birth of Christ and stopped it after their temple was burned to the ground and Jerusalem destroyed in 70 AD.<sup>iii</sup>

So for only 95 years or so, this practice was observed. Hundreds of ossuaries from the first century have been discovered and unearthed.

Then this one particular ossuary was discovered having been relatively ignored as it spent centuries in a cave and then still ignored by antiquities dealers.

That is until 2002 when a private dealer showed it to Andre Lemaire, a leading paleographer from the University of Paris.



And he of course immediately noted that the ossuary had been marked with several names; he immediately sensed the genuineness of the inscription as truly first century. He had studied hundreds of ossuaries.

The inscription was so faint that it would take a binocular microscope and then a scanning electron microscope to confirm the genuineness of this stunning engraving brought to light just a few years ago.

On the side of the ossuary were carved the words, "James, the son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus."

The discovery sparked a firestorm. If this was genuine, the world would have historical evidence outside of scripture that James was the son of Joseph and the brother, not cousin, the brother of Jesus.

We know from scripture that Jesus would have been legally adopted by his father, Joseph which would give him legal right to his ancestor, King David's throne; and that would make him the half-brother to James and several other siblings, born to Mary and Joseph.

What's even more stunning is that no ossuary from the first century included the name of anyone other than the name of the deceased and the name of his father, except for this one which makes its testimony all the more stunning.



James probably wouldn't have wanted it to say that by the way; he was satisfied to be known by the way he opened his letter *James, a slave of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Not a brother to Christ but His slave- chapter 1 and verse 1.

That was enough for James.

Oh, but the family no doubt and the believers evidently wanted everyone to know, as they placed his bones in the box, that he wasn't just any James.

In fact, they wanted him to be identified, not as the pastor of the church in Jerusalem or an Apostle of the early church - he was James, the son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus.

And if you think this discovery created an explosion, you would be correct.

It immediately launched what scholars called, "the forgery trial of the century."

The Israeli Antiquities Authority denied its validity and went on record claiming it was a forgery and that the name Jesus had been added centuries later.

The government began legal proceedings against the owner of the ossuary and the trial would last 3 years, involve more than 75 scholars and witnesses and over 9,000 pages of testimony.

Yet at the end of legal proceedings, in October 2008, after more than three years in court, the Israeli judge ordered the case dismissed lest there be further embarrassment to Israeli authorities.

One major newspaper in the US reported that the government's case finally collapsed when the government's star witness, the former chairman of Tel Aviv University's Institute of Archaeology, finally admitted upon cross examination in court that the name Jesus had been carved at the same time as names Joseph and James.<sup>iv</sup>

It was confirmed as authentic.



In the last few years, the ossuary has been displayed in different museums for all to see. Here it's on display in a French museum with the inscription translated into French.

## **1. Listen, the testimony of James to the unbelieving world did not end in the middle of the first century.**

And it has become in his bone box a unique testimony to the Lord he loved.

The ossuary of James marks the only time that Jesus' name appeared carved in stone or in anything else.

If I were Jesus, I would have left name tags all over Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Nazareth.

I ate here . . . I walked here . . . I slept here . . . I rose from the dead here . . . I'm coming back here!

I can still remember being sent to the corner of my classroom in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade by my teacher, Mrs. Jolly. On that afternoon, evidently, Mrs. Jolly wasn't living up to her name. I'm sure I had a lot to do with it.

I stood in the back of the classroom, in the corner, and I can still remember taking my pen and carving my initials into the cinderblock, muttering to myself, this school will remember me. I'll carve my name as a memento of this injustice.

Jesus Christ could have carved his name everywhere in stone as a reminder of how He was treated and who He really was. But beyond the record of scripture you'll find very little.

He has chosen instead to carve His name on human hearts and transformed lives.

But every so often God allows something to surface, some writing from an ancient historian, some scrolls bound in clay pots in caves above the Dead Sea, and in just the last few years validated under duress by the Government of Israel, the bone box of James, the son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus.

The testimony of James didn't end in the first century as he carves into stone the name of Jesus.

Let me make one more point here:

## **2. The testimony of God's servants ultimately influence far more than the testimony of the world's elite.**

In my study, I found it fascinating that another ossuary was discovered and identified.



It is the bone box of Caiaphas, the High Priest, who tried Jesus along with the Sanhedrin. It was in the courtyard of Caiaphas' own home where Peter would deny the Lord.

It was Caiaphas who later, after the church was created at Pentecost, brought Peter and the other Apostles before the court and demanded that they stop preaching that Jesus Christ was alive.

This is the ossuary of Caiaphas ornately carved and beautifully designed.

This is befitting for someone of influence and significance. He was the leading spiritual mover and shaker of his generation.

His bone box is everything you'd expect it to be . . . this is Westminster Abbey style . . . first class.

The ossuary of James by contrast is plane and ordinary and simple.



It's like the difference between a mahogany coffin and a pine box.

By the way, the son-in-law of Caiaphas, a man by the name of Annanus who became High Priest after Caiaphas, took advantage of that political vacancy when the governor of Palestine died and they were awaiting his replacement.<sup>v</sup>

Joseph, the first century Jewish historian informs us that during this political interval, Annanus moved quickly, brought James to trial and recant his belief that Jesus was truly the Messiah. James refused.

Josephus records that before anyone was barely aware of what was happening, James was found guilty of blasphemy and stoned to death.<sup>vi</sup>

The Jewish population was so upset by his actions that King Agrippa removed him from his role as High Priest, and for the most part, the worst of the reign of Caiaphas and his family ended.

What's left is an ornate bone box and that's about all.

But think of it, James is influencing millions of people to this day through his life and letter and legacy and the name and family of Caiaphas, if it were not in scripture, would have long been forgotten.

Listen, your influence in this life is not finished when you die and it isn't determined by how long the funeral procession will be when you do.

It's the quiet influence of servants of Jesus Christ that continue rippling outward.

- a praying mother,
- a faithful father,
- a diligent Sunday school teacher,
- a children's worker, deacon, volunteer, secretary
- it's the legacy of an honest mechanic,
- a caring doctor,
- a diligent student . . . who just walked with Christ . . . and without even knowing the half of it, left a legacy.

And so we say farewell to James whose testimony is still not silent. It isn't yet finished; neither is yours and mine, as we grow up and live out our faith as brothers and sisters in Christ.

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i Craig L. Blomberg & Mariam J. Kamell, *James: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Zondervan, 2008), p. 48

ii Biblical Archeological Review, "Burial Box of James the Brother of Jesus" by Andre Lemaire (November/December 2002), p. 24

iii Ibid, p. 26

iv Chris Ashcraft, *James Ossuary withstands Accusations* (Creation Magazine, Volume 32, 2010), p 43

v William Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter* (Westminster Press, 1976), p. 12

vi Biblical Archeological Review, p. 32