


**He chose to give us birth through the word of truth,
that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.**

~James 1:18



God's Upside-Down Economy
First in an occasional series on James,
titled "The Life of Faith"

A Roadmap: James 1

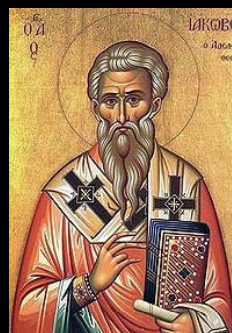
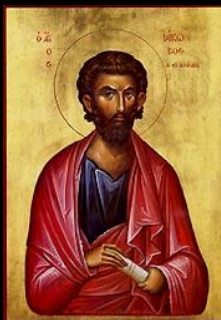
- Author (v1) – the story of James, the Lord’s brother
- True Joy (v2-8) – not product of external circumstances, but of eternal certainties
- True Riches (v9-12) – rightly knowing our total dependence on God
- True Gifts (v13-18) – come from the Giver of Life
- True Faith (v19-27) – draws nourishment from God, and manifests God’s upside-down economy

v1: Which James?



James (on left), son of Zebedee, brother of John ("Sons of Thunder") & one of the Twelve.
"James the Great"

James, son of Alphaeus & the "other" Mary, one of the Twelve.
"James the Less"



James, "the Lord's brother" and an apostle, led Jerusalem church.
"James the Just" or "James the Righteous"

James the Lord's Brother

- **Likely the oldest** of Mary & Joseph's children
Mark 6:3 "Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of **James**, Joseph, Judas [**Jude**] and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?"
- Likely close in age to Jesus:
 - Jesus' playmate & chore-mate -- giving James unparalleled exposure to how Jesus lived daily
 - As a child, James would have traveled to Jerusalem with his parents and Jesus for the **Feast of Passover** yearly (Luke 2: 41-52)



James the Lord's Brother

- James grew up attending synagogue worship with Jesus:
Luke 4:16 "He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom."
- In the Nazareth synagogue, Jesus and James would have been formally instructed in Hebrew and the Scriptures
- Older Jewish boys help teach younger boys during synagogue worship – thus James would have been taught as much by Jesus as by the synagogue elders.



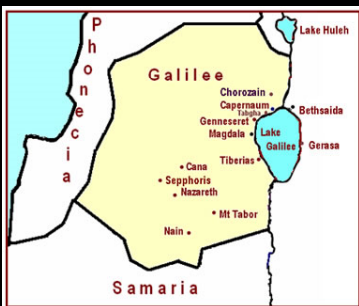
James the Lord's Brother

- James would have learned carpentry from Jesus as much as from Joseph
- Jesus, as the eldest, took on the provider role for his mother Mary and quite possibly for his younger siblings :
 - The absence of Joseph's name in Mark 6:3 leads most to infer Jesus' earthly father had died by then
 - Biblical scholars estimate that Jesus began his public ministry in his early 30s, thus working some 20 years as a carpenter to support his family
 - From the cross, Jesus entrusts the "disciple whom he loved" with the care of his mother (John 19:26-7)



James the Lord's Brother

- James was likely present at the wedding at Cana
- As Jesus focused his early ministry in Galilee, James may have witnessed Jesus' miracles, ate with the 5000, and heard some his teaching – including the Sermon on the Mount



James the Lord's Brother

- Yet, some of Jesus' teaching had to be hard for James to hear
- Matthew 12: 46-50:
 "While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."

James the Lord's Brother

- Despite James' intimate and firsthand knowledge of Jesus, he and his brothers REJECTED Jesus as the Son of God
- John 7:2-5 –
 But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near, Jesus' brothers said to him, "You ought to leave here and go to Judea, so that your disciples may see the miracles you do. No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." For even his own brothers did not believe in him.
- James and his brothers expected a this-worldly Messiah King, not a Suffering Servant announcing a Kingdom of Heaven that was both "now and not yet."

James the Lord's Brother

Paul reports, in 1st 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, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that 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. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.



James the Lord's Brother

- Acts 1: 14 – we find Jesus' disciples, the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and his brothers – all praying in the upper room following Jesus' ascension
- Acts 2:1 – “they were all together” on the Day of Pentecost
- Acts 8:1 – A great persecution, led by Saul, breaks out following the stoning of Stephen; only the apostles remain in Jerusalem
- Convert Paul travels to Jerusalem: “to get acquainted with Peter and stayed with him fifteen days. I saw none of the other apostles – only James, the Lord's brother” Galatians 1:18-19



James the Lord's Brother

Peter & James pastor the underground Jerusalem church

- James' status indicated by Peter's message for James following his miraculous release from prison (Acts 12: 17)
- James' zeal for the law evident in sending men to the Antioch church, who in turn convinced Peter and Barnabas to stop eating with uncircumcised Gentiles (Gal 2: 11-13)
- Paul opposes Peter, which leads to the Jerusalem council
- James plays a central role in the Jerusalem Council, being the first to speak and affirm Paul's explanation that Gentiles need not be circumcised or follow the ritual laws (Acts 15)
- James likely writes the Council's letter, which begins with the distinctive "Greetings"

Finally, separate accounts by Eusebius & Josephus concur that James was stoned to death for his faith in AD 62.

v1: "Joyful Hello"

- Of all the things that James could rightfully and honestly say about himself, he says this: "a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ"
- James demonstrates the very humility with which he is about to challenge his readers, wholly inhabiting God's upside-down economy
- Then he writes: *chairein*!
 - The proper start of a Greek letter
 - It means "Glad, joyful hello!" or "Joy be to you!"

v2-8: True Joy

- With an inspired, poetic turn of his “joyful hello” [chairein], James moves to the most difficult and advanced lesson in all Christian living: reckoning *as pure joy* [chara] our trials of many kinds!
- Philippians is the Bible’s dissertation on joy – written by Paul, imprisoned in Rome and literally in chains, it uses the words joy, joyful, and rejoice 16 times!

v2-8: True Joy

“As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.... Because of this I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help given by the Spirit of Jesus Christ, what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. **For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.**” (Phil 1:13-21)

v2-8: True Joy

- In God's Upside-Down Economy ...
 - Joy is a product NOT of our External Circumstances, which can range from pleasant to horrific
 - Joy is a result of our **ETERNAL CERTAINITIES**
 - Thus Paul can say “to live is Christ and to die is gain”
 - Death is not loss for the Christian, it is VICTORY
 - Death's inversion from loss to victory resides at the heart of God's upside-down economy

v2-8: True Joy

- Consider it pure joy:
 - Because trials and testing produce a **mature and enduring faith** – which is of incomparable value
 - Christians should welcome spiritual maturity, in other words, with the same joy as a mother welcomes her newborn child



v2-8: True Joy

- Sorting it out
 - Ask for wisdom to guide you through trials and testing
 - Know that God is eager to give you wisdom, but don't waffle when you ask
 - Those who lack confidence in God's sovereign oversight become like waves, which are movements of water that last a moment and disappear
 - Tossed waves are opposite of the persevering faith James exhorts us to treasure



v2-8: True Joy

- In God's Upside-Down Economy:
 - We don't run from testing or trials
 - We don't blame or complain
 - We don't take the easy way out
 - We don't pray half-heartedly or as a last resort
 - RATHER, we reckon as pure joy the testing that produces mature and enduring faith, and ask God for wisdom to discern the path of obedience

v9-12: True Riches



- Earthly riches FADE:
 - faster than a petunia in a desert
 - faster than you can say “Lehman Brothers,” “Countrywide Financial,” “Bernie Madoff,” “Enron,” or “Arthur Andersen”



v9-12: True Riches

- In God’s Upside-Down Economy:
 - Christians know that God is the auditor, and we are but stewards of His resources
 - Christians, rich and poor, **equally** recognize their **total** dependence on God



v13-18: True Gifts



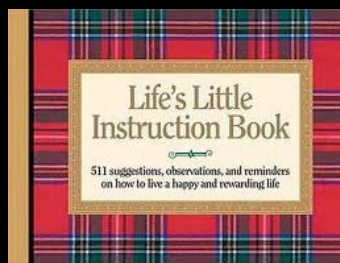
- Understanding desire:
 - Desire is not inherently evil; Bible uses it positively and negatively
 - Desire is, however, indiscriminating
 - Deadly path: desire enticed (“entrapped”) & **dragged away** (from God), conceived (decided), birthed (carried out), full grown (pattern established), death (destruction of others, self)

v13-18: True Gifts

- The path of obedience is the path of blessing!
 - James’ beatitude of obedience: Blessed are those who “persevere under trial” and stand “the test”(v12)
- Which brings us to the extraordinary important v18:
 - “Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (ESV)

v13-18: True Gifts

- Too quick a reading of James can impart the lesson of Moralism: that we need to 'try harder' to live Christianly – to buck up, smile harder, and by force of human will do good things more often and bad things less often.
- Verse 18 is the antidote to the Poison of Quaint Moralism



v13-18: True Gifts



- The life of faith to which God calls us is NOT a nice collection of "New Year's Resolutions!"
- We cannot "resolve" to do it:
 - We confront a spiritual army that possesses the equivalent of tanks and rocket launchers
 - Against which willful resolutions are as effective as water pistols
- The life of faith is wholly impossible without **Gospel Rebirth** through the Word of Truth
- Gospel Rebirth is a Sovereign GIFT from God, bestowed that we might be gifts ("a kind of firstfruits") of all that God created

v19-27: True Faith

Draws upon the nourishment that the fruit tree's roots deliver to its branches, so that we:

- Are quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to become angry
- Rid ourselves of moral filth
- Humbly accept the word planted in us
- Look intently into the perfect law (God's Word) that gives freedom
- Do not forget what we learn, but do it
- Rein in our tongue
- Care for widows & orphans



Looking into God's Mirror

- In James' day, mirrors were made of costly polished brass – so to look in one was, for all but the most wealthy, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity
- Today, we have looked into God's mirror and seen God's Upside-Down Economy, where:
 - trials that produce an enduring, mature faith are greeted with pure joy
 - riches lie in recognizing our total dependence on God
 - gifts of new birth come from the Father
 - and faith, rooted in God, bears fruit
- May we **treasure** this utmost privilege!

