

## James #1 - Jesus' Bold Little Brother

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- While it's a new year, we got a brand new book of the Bible we're starting James. We're gonna be in it for about four months. So before we get into the book I want you to get to know the author, this man named James because the truth is, if you wanna get to know somebody you need to get to know them, and their friends, and especially their family, amen. That was grace and I story. 25 years ago grace and I started getting to know one another. I got to know her, and then I got to know some of her friends. Liked her, liked her friends, and I had to go meet her family. How many you guys remember that day? Oh, that was a tough day. I was a 17-year-old kid, Grace's dad was a pastor, and I was terrified to go meet with a pastor for obvious reasons. I was so scared. I jumped in my first car in 1956 Chevy, here this guys, this has nothing to do with the sermon but it's very important. It had 60,000 total original miles, and I sold it 'cause I didn't think it was cool. And every morning I wake up and slap myself for selling the 19... I didn't think it was cool 'cause it had four doors. And today that I've got five kids we could use four doors. And anyways I jumped in my old Chevy, and I went to pick up grace, and meet her family 'cause you really get to know somebody when you get to know their family, 'cause the family knows stuff about you that no one else knows, right? And usually tells it to people to humiliate you publicly. So I went to meet Grace's family, and they lived on a cul-de-sac, and I was so nervous I drove by the house multiple times just trying to muster up the courage to pull over, and go meet her family, and her dad who was a pastor. But as I got to know Grace's family I got to know more about grace, and who had influenced her, and who had shaped her, and why she grew to be the person that I grew to fall in love with. What's true for all of our relationships is true for our relationship with Jesus. If you really wanna get to know Jesus you gotta listen to him, and you gotta learn from him. You need to get to know his friends in the Bible they're called apostles, the guys that he spent most of his time with but especially you need to get to know his family. And that's what we're gonna do today. We're gonna get to know Jesus' family. And the truth is there's not a lot said about Jesus' family, and there's not a lot known about Jesus' early years. In fact some of the early church creeds that are very important to Christian belief say it like this, that he was born of the Virgin, and suffered and died under Pontius Pilate. What they skip is his life. He was born and he died, wouldn't that be a terrible obituary for you? Yeah, Tom was born and then he died. And we're like that's it? That's all we got. That's all the creeds say because there's not a lot of information about those years where Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, and favor with men and God like it says in I think Luke 2:52. But you know who was there? His family. Jesus' family was there to see him as a little boy, adolescence, young man, grown man. If he had any sin they

would have seen it, and they would tell us just like your family does, right? They tell people the worst things you've ever done. If Jesus had any faults, failures, or flaws, his family would be the one to know, and his family would be the one to tell. They were there for years of his life before he was public, before he was famous, before he was well-known they knew him the most, and they saw him in the years when no one else observed him. That being said his family's testimony is incredibly helpful and insightful as we learn about this man, the most important man in the history of the world, the most significant man in the history of the world, the most worshiped man in the history of the world, Jesus Christ. And so we're gonna jump into the book of James today, and we're gonna get to know Jesus bold little brother. We'll start in James 1:1, and the whole sermon is gonna be on one verse of the Bible, and then we're gonna go back and study some other related sections of scripture. But we begin here, "James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the 12 tribes in the dispersion, greetings." Well, who's he writing to? The 12 tribes, this echoes the Old Testament 12 tribes of Israel. That was the Old Testament language for God's people. So he's writing to God's people, and they are scattered. So it's a network of churches in various locations together under the leadership of James kind of like Mars Hill, we are one church scattered into multiple locations. It would be accurate to call it a dispersion, we are dispersed across various locations but one church under one message. So here James is the senior leader, he's a teacher, and a preacher, and a writer, and he has authority over a whole network of churches. And this message that he is giving goes out to all of those churches kind of like not identical but like the way we do things here at Mars Hill Church, there's a biblical precedent and pattern here, and most of these people would have been Jewish. This is believed to be one of the first books written in the New Testament. And at that point a lot of the Christians were Jewish. The later many Gentiles would join. And today the few billion people on earth who worship Jesus the majority of us are Gentiles, not Jews, but at this point the majority of them were in fact Jewish. Well, that's who he's writing to, and he is writing as a servant of God, and of the Lord Jesus Christ. So his positioned for Jesus is Lord, he's high and exalted, ruling and reigning, and authority overall. Jesus he is the savior, come to save us from our sins, and Christ the anointed one of God. So in those three titles he tells us who Jesus is. He's the Lord who saves us, and was chosen by God the Holy Spirit to be empowered for a life that was perfect, and without sin that we might be saved through him. And he says that he is his servant. I'm gonna make the argument that James is Jesus' brother, and some would ask why does he not say I'm Jesus' brother? I believe there's a few reasons. Number one, he didn't need to. If you were Jesus' brother everybody knew that, you didn't have to put that on your resume. I'm James. Number two, there's a lot of guys named James in the New Testament. And they'll say, James son of this guy, or James son of that guy to denote who it is. Anytime it just says James this guy is so well known he doesn't need any additional information. Thirdly to say he was Jesus' brother could give the impression that he was proud, and here he wants to follow in his brother's example of humility. So he doesn't say I'm Jesus' brother he says I'm Jesus' servant. When he was on earth, yeah, maybe we shared bunk beds together. But now that he's exalted in heaven he's Lord over me, and I'm servant under him, do you get that? And so he's following the example of his big brother Jesus, who said that he did not come to be served but to serve. Jesus example is one of servanthood and humility, and James is not only Jesus' brother he's Jesus' disciple, and he's following in his big brother's example, he says, my job is to

serve Jesus that's why I'm here. The question then is which James is this? Depending upon which scholar you believe there's between 40 and 60 occasions in the New Testament where somebody named James is mentioned. And it refers again depending upon which scholar you prefer to five, six, seven, eight different men, it was a popular name, it was a derivative of the Old Testament named Jacob, one of the patriarchs so it's a very popular name. Well, there's a number of guys named James, and usually it tells us who their father was usually when it tells us just that it was James it's in reference to Jesus' brother. But there are three positions regarding Jesus' relationship with this man James. The first is that they were stepbrothers. And it is taught that Jesus' father Joseph, his adoptive earthly father Joseph had a marriage prior to Mary, and that he had children including James, and then perhaps his wife died, and he became a widower. And then he married Mary that was his second, therefore James would have been from the first marriage, and was a stepbrother to Jesus. There's no evidence for this in the Bible. I think it is speculative at best. It doesn't seem to fit with a preponderance of evidence that we receive in God's word. Every indication is that Mary and Joseph were a young, poor, rural couple, that they were getting married for the first time. There's no mention of any prior wife, there's no mention of any prior children so let's dismiss that position. The second is that Jesus and James were cousins. That the word for brothers and sisters that is going to be used throughout the scriptures regarding Jesus' extended family and immediate family it is a broad word they would say, it is not a narrow word it doesn't refer just to your brothers and sisters but to your kin, your clan, your extended family. And that is probable but not likely. Lemme say this way, it is possible but not probable, that's a better way to state it. It is possible that they were cousins but it is not probable for a couple of reasons. One is that they receive a lot of attention in the Bible, and why would his extended family receive more attention than his immediate family? Like for example we know very little about Joseph Jesus' adoptive father, but it keeps mentioning his brothers and sisters. In addition that's not the clearest reading of scripture. And in addition it's not the historical reading of scripture. What it is is motivated by something where there was a council that met hundreds of years after Jesus, and they came up with this phrase that Jesus' mother Mary was ever-virgin, *Semper Virgo*, that She was ever-virgin. And so the teaching was that not only was Mary a virgin when she was betrothed to Joseph, and conceived by a miracle of the Holy Spirit Jesus before she had any relation with any man. That not only was she a virgin at that point that she remained a virgin for the rest of her life, that she never had any consummation with her husband, Joseph, she never had any intimate relation with her husband. The Catholic church still teaches this today. And I believe that these first and second positions are motivated by trying to compel us to see Mary as a virgin for the totality of her life. How many of you were raised Catholic? How many of you were raised Catholic, okay? Welcome. Good to have you. I was raised Catholic too, okay? Inside joke for us former Catholics. I was raised Catholic too, and I was taught Mary was always a virgin. To be fair some Protestant Reformers like Calvin and Luther also said similar things. And the goal is to present her as a perpetual virgin but I don't think that was the case, I don't think that's the case in scripture. It says in Luke that she was a virgin until Jesus was born. And then we get every indication that Mary and Joseph had a a normal marriage that was consummated with normal relations. So that brings us to the third alternative, and the first again was that that James and Jesus were stepbrothers, the second is that they were cousins, the third position I believe it's

the most accurate reading of scripture, and it's the position I'll be taking for the totality of our time together, and that is that there half brothers. That the Jesus' mother and father that it was their first marriage, they got married, through a miracle of the Holy Spirit the virgin Mary conceived and birth the Lord Jesus. After Jesus was born they consummated their marriage. They went on to have a normal, loving marriage that produced a lot of kids, and they had a big family, and that James was one of Jesus' brothers and sisters. And I'll show you why I've come to that conclusion as we study scripture together. And what you'll find is that we learn a lot in the Bible particularly the New Testament about let's say Paul or Peter. We don't learn a lot about James. And when we do learn about Jesus' family the spotlight tends to go on Mary, Godly, devout, amazing woman. But sort of off to the side in the dark shadows are his brothers and sisters, and very little is taught regarding them. And some of you may have been in church rather for a long time, and not heard a lot about Jesus' family. Would you like to get to know Jesus' family? That's what we're going to do. So let us start in Mark's gospel. And I can't cover every single text that covers Jesus' family. I'll cover many of them, and I'll put all of them on a big blog for you so you could study it for yourself. But the first thing we learned is that James disbelieved Jesus. Mark chapter 3 verse 21 and 31-32, "And when his family heard it", this is Jesus' family, "They went out to seize him for they were saying he's what? He is out of his mind. And his mother and his brothers came. And standing outside they sent to him, and called him, and a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, 'Your mother and brothers are outside seeking you.'" So early on Jesus is preaching and teaching, and at this point he has left his father and mother. He's been working as a carpenter with his dad. At this point he's in his early 30's, around 30. Think of it like a guy who goes off, and joins the military, or heads off to college, or moves out of his parents' house to start his career. He's at that season and stage of life. He's not a little boy at home, he's a grown man, single living on his own, and he's beginning his public ministry. So the family is not with him consistently but they're with him intermittently. Just like if you've grown up and left home, your family's not there every day like when you lived in the same house but they do your life at strategic points. You get holidays together and time together. And you know one another and you love one another, and your lives are intertwined together. None of Jesus' brothers were chosen as his 12 disciples. His disciples tended to be with him almost full-time for three years, and the family weaves in and out of occasions and events throughout his life. And here's an indication of what they thought, they thought he had lost his mind because he kept saying that he was God, that he was savior, that he was creator, that he was king, and his family was concerned. How many of you if your brothers started saying this you'd be concerned too? If your brother, you know, you check his Facebook status, and it says he's God, really? I knew he had a high self-esteem but it seems like he's overshot. God, and you're like, oh wow. All of a sudden your brother's in the news, and your brother is getting a lot of attention, and crowds are coming out, people are listening to him. Well, what's he saying? He's saying he created the heavens and the earth, and he's come down to judge the living and the dead. Family is like we gotta get them home, we gotta get them home. We gotta shut and lock the door, we gotta get him some camomile tea, and nobody needs to listen to him, he has, , the oars are not in the water, he is not doing good. You get that. And this is important because some of you have the same perspective of Jesus as his family did. A guy says he's God, that's crazy. They started there. It's okay for you to start there, I want you to see their

progression, and I want you to have there same progression. What's important here as well is to understand that Christianity is founded on the claim that Jesus is God. And some would say, well, it's a ruse, it's a shell game, it's put together by a con man, and his family was in on it. His family was not in on it. His family did not originally initially believe his claims to be gone. They had resistance to it, they were concerned for him. But are you this? His family loved him. They didn't just disown him and let them go, they show up, there's a crowd, somebody go get Jesus, tell him his mom's here, and his brothers are here. They love him, they're concerned about him, they're worried about them. We would call this an intervention today. Jesus got an intervention. And if you're here his claims to be God are either true or false but he made those claims. And his family knew he made those claims. The story continues in Mark chapter six, James dishonored Jesus, Mark 6:3-4, so here's the conversation that's happening, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" And then here's some of the family members, the brother of James, and Joseph, and Judas, and Simon. Jesus and his mother, and then here it names four brothers. You're gonna hear about sisters as well so this is a big family. Tangentially how bombed is the brother whose name happened to be Judas? How bummed is that guy? Oh, you're Jesus' brother, what's your name? Ugh, Judas. Oh, I heard about you. I'm not that Judas, right? I'm Tom Bin Laden, I'm a totally different guy, right? Like it's just... So bummer for that guy but it's a different Judas. Just like there's a lot of guys named James there a lot of guys named Judas in the New Testament. And are not his sisters here with us? So Jesus, James, Joses, Judas, Simon, four kids, Jesus makes five and sisters, that's at least two, big family, big family, big family. And they took what? Offense at him. They were offended by some of the things Jesus was saying. How many of you have been offended by some of the things Jesus says? And Jesus said to them, a prophet, he says he's a prophet, big statement, big statement, prophet. You read the Old Testament? I'm like Moses, I'm bigger than Moses. Moses said that a prophet would be coming in Deuteronomy I'm here that's me. A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, and among his relatives, and in his own household. Here's what Jesus saying, I go out and preach and teach, and lots of people come and listen to me but not my own family. How many of you've had that experience? Like man I'm respected except with my family, I'm honored except by my family, I'm listened to except by my family. How many of you have tried to teach your parents something, and found it didn't go well? How many of you have tried to teach your brother or sister something, and realize they weren't listening? That was Jesus' situation. His brothers, and his family, and his sisters, they didn't honor him. Others were listening to him they weren't listening to him, others were following him they were not necessarily following him. He was dishonored by them. How many of you felt hurt 'cause your family didn't support you? How many felt hurt 'cause your family wasn't there for you? How many felt hurt 'cause your family didn't have a great dignity toward you? This had to be lonely for Jesus. I mean, he's walking into a stiff headwind of resistance, he knows that his days are numbered, and his death is coming, and he doesn't have the support of his family. Now again they don't oppose him, they don't hate him, they're not mean to them, they're not cruel to him, I don't wanna overstate my case, they keep pursuing him, and speaking to him, and they're trying to help him, and trying to love him, and trying to serve him, but they don't yet fully understand, or at least receive who he is. Sometimes your family are the last people to see you for who you've become. Now Jesus had no sin, for those of us who were sinners it makes sense. Our family

was there when we were little, our family was there for the best and worst parts of our life, and sometimes who we've become is tainted by who we were. But for Jesus he was without sin so his family, and their unwillingness to see him for who he is is not based upon anything he's done. But true or false? It would be hard to see ladies your son as God, true or false? Like I changed his diaper, and I'm supposed to worship him. How many of you would be hard to see your brother as God? And if you have a brother... Like many of us they warm up to Jesus's God over time. They love him, they respect and appreciate things about him, they're staggered by his claims and resistance, comes to some of his instruction, but you're gonna see that they warm up over time. Some of you are like that, some of you know a little about Jesus, maybe you try to be a good person, you believe a little bit of the Bible. You don't hate Jesus, you're not opposed to Jesus but you're not convinced yet he's God. You're in the warming up process as his family was. Well, the story continues that James also doubted Jesus. John is one of the most significant gospels to give us insight into the thinking of Jesus' brothers. And John too there with him, the family is at his first miracle in Cana of Galilee where he returns water into wine. So they've seen him do some things that are supernatural and miraculous. They are traveling some with him at that point. The story then jumps to John 7:2-5, "Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand." So it's like a holiday like Thanksgiving, or Christmas, or Easter. You know, the family gets together, it's a holiday. So as brothers said to him, so the brothers are together, they're like-minded, they're thinking the same thing so they approach him as a group. They say to Jesus, "Leave here and go to Judea that your disciples also may see the works you were doing for no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things show yourself to the world." Here is the tell, here's the tell, for not even his brothers believed him. Here's what his brothers are saying, you think you're a big deal then leave our small town. You think you're God, Lord, and king, and savior, and Christ, go to the big city, go public, preach that to the world, show that to the world, go for it. How many of you have reached a point with somebody where you're in disagreement with them, and say you know what? If that's what you think go do it. And you're convinced they're wrong I'm right, and this'll prove that I'm right and they're wrong. That's the heart of what's going on with Jesus' brothers. You say your God, you say your creator, you say your savior, go to the big city, go tell it publicly, go prove it openly, go prove us wrong. Sometimes families can be complicated and discouraging. And some of you look at your family like, man, I had a hard family, you're not alone. Jesus had a devout good Godly family but even a good devout Godly family has moments of failure where they discourage you, or they oppose you, so did Jesus. I love the humanity in this. I love that the whole family isn't just walking around with halos saying pithy statements and raising dead people. I love the fact that they are real people with real doubts in a real process coming to real faith in a real Jesus. I love that, 'cause the Bible is the most honest book that's ever been written. Now what happens is that Jesus does leave town, Jesus does go to the big city, Jesus does preach and teach that he's God, Jesus does do miracles, Jesus does it all. And he is arrested and tried for this claim, he said he was God. If you're here and you're not a Christian you need to understand this, Jesus was put to death because he claimed to be God. The governmental leaders saw that as an offense to their political leadership, the religious leaders saw that as an offense to their theological convictions. And they agreed together, the Bible says those who were Jewish, those who were Gentile, those who were Roman, everybody agreed that guy needs to die, that guy

needs to die. He says he's God, he says he's God. When they came to arrest Jesus he asked them, "For what cause do you put me to death? And the answer was because you a mere man claim to be God, that was the answer. Jesus claimed to be God. If you're here you have to address this, you have to wrestle with this, you cannot ignore this. Jesus said he was God, his family was resistant initially to that, and others opposed him ultimately murdered him because he said he was God. And that claim is true or false, it's not made by the founder of any other major world religion, Jesus stands alone in a category unto himself. And who was there at the death of Jesus when he was beaten and flogged and crucified? The Bible tells us that at the foot of the cross was his mother, Mary. There was his mother. Ladies imagine the horror of that day, your first son, a miracle baby that God gave you. When you held him counted 10 fingers, 10 toes, you weren't thinking that they would end up nailed to a Roman cross. Your son is being murdered openly, publicly, shamefully, because of his claim to be deity. You feared this day was coming that's why you got the family together, and tried to bring them home. You feared that this was going to be his fate. I don't think it's unreasonable to assume that the family was there. I mean if your day of execution came, and your mother was there I would hope that your brothers and sisters would be there to support her. And Jesus is murdered, he is crucified. He's then wrapped in upwards of 100 pounds of burial linens and spices. His body is put in a tomb. His family knows he's dead. Mary is devastated. The sisters are destroyed, and the brothers are distraught. The family is weeping, and the brothers are trying to encourage Mary, and love their sisters, and make sense of the death of their big brother. The family has a funeral, the family sheds their tears, the family mourns their loss. And then three days later unprecedented in the history of the world, vindicating everything Jesus ever said or did Jesus rises from death, Jesus alone conquers death. The wage for sin is death, and because Jesus had no sin death could not contain him. This is the most magnificent, unprecedented, epic event in the history of the world, Jesus rises from death. And Paul records historically what happened in 1 Corinthians 15:7, then he appeared to who? James, then to all the apostles. Can you imagine that? Can you imagine that reunion between James and his big brother Jesus? I don't know what it looked like, I don't know if it was a , , James opens the door there's Jesus, nail scarred hands. I'm back, I conquered death, I told you I was God. Yes sir you are, amen. Friends that's how it happened, okay? That's how it happened. Well, wherever James was on the continuum of faith in Jesus this is where the switch got flipped. He's in, Jesus is God, everything he said is true. He's my creator, He's my substitute, He's my resurrected savior, I'm in. James appears to be hot and cold, and in and out until Jesus has risen from death, and they have their face-to-face reunion. Let me say this as well, others will teach that Jesus didn't die, that someone who looked like Jesus died, a body double, a stunt double, you know who would know? His family. You can fool a lot of people but not a guy's mom, not a guy's brother. James saw it with his own eyes. James' testimony for us is credible, historical, and truthful. Jesus rose from death. And they had this reunion. Can you imagine what that was like? When we get to the kingdom of God I wanna ask James, how did that go? Like were you laughing, were you cry? Like I am sorry, I am so sorry. Or like Jesus you're back, or stunned, or shocked, or what happened? Did you fall down and worship him like Thomas did? Did you just embrace and weep upon him? Did you rejoice? Did you pick him up? What did you do? Amazing there was James. And once he saw his big brother risen from death he changed. Friends I want you to receive Jesus as risen from death, and I

want you to change. Wherever you've been on your continuum of faith I want you to come to the place that James arrived, Jesus is God, He died for my sin, he rose to conquer sin and death, he's my God and savior. And this is one of the most credible, historical evidences for the resurrection of Jesus friends. Cause and effect. What I'm going to show you in a moment is how James became a leader, and a pastor, and a preacher, and ultimately a martyr, cause and effect. But what accounts for the change in James? He didn't believe in Jesus, he didn't worship Jesus, he didn't agree with all the teaching of Jesus, and then he did. He went from trying to get his brother to stop saying what he was saying to saying the same things that his brother said, cause and effect. The burden of proof for those of you would disagree with the testimony of the historical record of God's word, the burden of proof is with you. How else can you account for the transformation in James? If Jesus died and didn't rise why in the world would he become this bold preacher, and servant of Jesus as God? The burden of proof is on you. The only thing that accounts for that kind of radical transformation, and thinking, and commitment, is the resurrection of Jesus from death. If someone dies we tend not to devote our life to them as God, we tend not to follow in their footsteps, and pattern ourselves after their exempt, we tend to mourn their loss and move on, not James. In fact, James joined the early church, we see this in Acts 1:14, this is the account of the early church, it's not a lot of people. Today Christianity is arguably a few billion people on the earth say Jesus is God. In that day there was only about 120 of them. And it's recorded historically in the book of Acts, and they gathered together, and here's what we read, "And these with one accord", so there's unity in the early church, "Were devoting themselves", so it's ongoing and habitual, "To prayer together with the women and who? Mary the mother of Jesus and his brothers." Who are the first converts? Who's the first core group for the church plant? Who were the first people who signed up for Christianity? Jesus' mother and brothers. Do you feel the weight of that? They didn't believe this until he rose from death. And they were a devout Jewish family. Think of the most devout religious family you know. Maybe very devout Jewish or very devout Muslim, they are all about doing it right, following the rules, obeying the Lord, like whatever their understanding of God's commands are they're very devoted to those. Every indication is that Jesus' family was like that. Mary and Joseph devout Jewish people, they make their pilgrimage to the temple, they offer the sacrifice to those who were poor, these are devout people, these are devout people, and they know the 10 commandments. The first of which is there's only one God, and the second is you only worship that God, or the consequences you go to hell forever. So they're not people like us who dabble in spirituality, and try on religions, and maybe experiment with a new concept of divinity. They're not like that. They're devout. And all of a sudden they worshiped Jesus as God. Jesus' own mother worshiped him as God. Jesus own brothers worshiped him as God. This is amazing, how many of you would not worship your brother as God? Like if you could pick anybody on the earth, you'd say, yeah, brother, last guy I'd pick. Satan, I'd pick him as Satan but I'd not pick him as God I lived with that guy he was horrible, he did horrible things. We know the sins of our brothers, we know the failures of our brothers, we know the faults and flaws of our brothers, and they worshiped their brother as sinless God and savior, and they're part of the early church. In addition James and his brother Jude, Jesus' brothers, they become very powerful pastors, okay? So we've looked at James 1:1, and Jude 1:1 is going to echo much of what is said in James 1:1. Jude a servant of Jesus Christ so again servant, not boastful Jesus'

brother, humble Jesus' servant, and brother of who? James. Mary and Joseph apparently had quite a family. They raised Jesus, and James, and Jude. One of their sons is the point of the whole Bible, the other two sons wrote books of the Bible. That's a pretty amazing family. Some of you need to know that the most amazing ministry you will do is not by you but through your children. Joseph never wrote a book of the Bible his sons did, his sons did. You can be humble, you could be poor, you could be hardworking, you could be blue collar and very effective if you raise your children to love and serve the Lord. We don't know a lot about Joseph but everything we need to know we can know by looking at his family. We know a little bit more about Mary but everything we need to know we know by looking at her family. The grace of God through the Holy Spirit at work through this mother and father led to servants of God that are amazing. This is a family that is worth modeling ourselves after by the grace of God. These men have such authority that they write books of the Bible, James and Jude. We hear a lot about Paul, we hear a lot about Peter, we don't hear a lot about Jesus' brothers. Well, you can add Jude to the list. This is a very large family with a lot of brothers and some sisters. The story continues in Acts chapter 15, there is one of the most important meetings in the history of the world, that's not an overstatement. Early Christianity Jesus was Jewish, his family was Jewish, they were waiting the Old Testament Messiah, they converted to worshipping Jesus, some did, the original converts to Jesus were Jewish. And then as Christianity spreads Gentiles start to be saved of their sin, and filled with the Holy Spirit, and worship Jesus as God. So like you and me most of us are not Jewish we're Gentile. The question then was, what do we do with all the Gentiles? It was a big question. A lot of the New Testament is dedicated to answering that issue. The question was, well, do all the men need to get circumcised? 'Cause we're told the Gentile men get circumcised, and they're like, oh, double-check, we're not sure. Make sure before we just do that, we're not ready to sign up, go check. We told them they couldn't eat ham sandwiches anymore, or pork ribs. And they said, yeah, run it by a committee, double-check, we're not ready to give up pork products, and go get circumcised. Like if there's a plan B all the Gentiles voted, yeah, we'll take plan B. So there was a question, do all the Gentiles need to convert to Judaism? So they convened a meeting in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the mother church, Jerusalem was headquarters. One of the ways that you know that someone has significant spiritual authorities is they have convening power, okay? So when a meeting is called somewhere not everybody's going to go, but if a meeting's called in Jerusalem, everybody's gonna come. You know why? The highest ranking spiritual leaders are there. Now in the New Testament there are people who are itinerant, and they travel around. The quintessential example is Paul, and there's guys like Timothy and Titus who do that with him, Barnabas as well. They're traveling planting churches. Two guys stay put in Jerusalem, right? The trunk. Peter, the leader of Jesus' disciples always named first in the list of disciples 'cause he is the human leader appointed by Jesus, and James Jesus' brother. They stayed in Jerusalem, they oversaw the trunk, and they nourished the branches. And when the controversy erupts out at the new church plants what do we do with all the Gentiles? Then it was we need to have a meeting. Everybody come into Jerusalem we all need to sit down, and we're gonna figure out what God's will is for the Gentiles. Not everybody got to go to that meeting only the highest ranking spiritual leaders. You need to see that in the New Testament there are levels of spiritual leadership, and spiritual authority. Not everybody goes to the meeting, it's not a congregational

vote, they don't cast a ballot across all the churches. The senior leaders get together. They open God's word, they study, they pray, they seek the will of the Holy Spirit, they try and figure out what God's will is for the Gentile converts. And they're doing so in Jerusalem which is overseen by Peter and James. And everything turns in one of the most important meetings in the history of the world, or fate is at stake. Those of us who are Gentiles here's what we read in Acts 15, in the middle of that meeting verses 12 and 13, "And the assembly fell silent, and they listened to Barnabas and Paul, as they related what signs and wonders God had done through them among the Gentiles." Not everybody's there but certain guys are there, Peter's there. It'll be hard to argue that anybody has more spiritual authority on earth in that day than Peter appointed by Jesus to lead. Paul's there. Any living apostles disciples of Jesus are there. This was an invite only, closed door meeting. Not everybody gets to come, and not everybody gets to speak. And it gets very quiet. And the floor is given to Paul and to Barnabas, who've been doing itinerant ministry out on the branches. Tell us about the new fruit, tell us about who's meeting Jesus, tell us about who the Holy Spirit is filling, tell us about what is happening, and they give a report. There's an explosion, the Holy Spirit's been unleashed. Gentiles are meeting Jesus, they're repenting of sin, they're falling in love with the God of the Bible, and there are many of them, and churches are getting planted all over the place. And what God is doing is extraordinary. And we're bringing you a report back to the trunk of what God is doing with new fruit at the edge of the branch, and everybody's quiet. And there's that dramatic pause. And in one of the most important meetings in the history of the world the question is, who will stand up and speak for God? Who will the Holy Spirit speak through? After they finished speaking James replied, brothers, listen to me, Paul, listen to me, Barnabas, listen to me, Peter, listen to me, do you sense the weight of that? I don't have that kind of authority. I doubt I would have been led in the room. If so I would have been in the corner quiet taking notes, not standing up saying brothers, listen to me. I don't have that spiritual authority James does. And James teaches the Old Testament, and James leads the early church, and James sets the trajectory, yes along with Peter, and yes along with Paul, and yes along with Barnabas, and the apostles 'cause the Holy Spirit brings them to unity of mind regarding God's will for the Gentile converts. Here's why I tell you this, we're going to spend almost four months together looking at the book of James, and his word is, listen to me, listen to me, listen to me. If Peter is willing to sit, and Paul is willing to sit, and Barnabas is willing to sit, and they're all willing to listen to James, if they're willing to sit under his spiritual authority these are men who wrote books of the Bible, and they're under his authority. So as we study his book of the Bible I want you to respect his authority, I want you to honor his authority, I want you to hear him as they heard him. The story continues, Paul speaks of James in his letter to the Galatians. Here's what he says in Galatians 1:18-19, then after three years I went up to Jerusalem, right? Convening power, everybody's gotta come, give your report. To see first that's Peter, and remained with him 15 days. We don't know what they talked about but apparently they covered a lot. Think of a meeting between Peter and Paul for 15 days. This is quite a meeting. But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother, James the Lord's brother. Paul submitted to the authority of Peter and James. Now, when you and I read the New Testament the guy who's written more books than anybody is who? Paul. Paul wasn't just in authority he was under authority, hugely important. I'm not just in authority I'm under authority, I have pastors do my performance review, can rebuke me, can terminate me,

whatever the case may be. It's important to know that everyone needs to be under spiritual authority including those who are in spiritual authority. Repeatedly in the book of Acts this happens more than one occasion it reports it here in Galatians, Paul makes the long journey to Jerusalem, it's not easy, so that he could sit down, and get his performance review with Peter and James. Do you see that? What this does for instance this puts James in a level of authority with the apostles, that's what he does right here. And with Peter who is appointed by Jesus to be the human leader of the entire movement of early Christianity. We've not studied James enough, we've not considered James enough, we've not honored James enough. He's been overlooked. Not entirely but he's not received the kind of regard that he is worthy of based upon simply what the Bible says about him. So I'm so excited we're gonna do that, we're gonna study James for almost four months together. But I want you to see him for who he is, a bold preacher, teacher, writer of the Bible, leader of Christianity, working from the most important church on the earth, feeding, nourishing the other churches, and church planting movements, and men like Paul will travel many, many miles to sit across from him and to learn from him. It's magnificent that James wrote a book for us, and that we get to sit down like Paul sat down, and we get to learn from him as Paul sat down from him. And I would say this, those who would tell you, and we're gonna get into this in James, and I don't wanna get too far down the road but some will say, well, I see conflict between James and Paul. I don't. Paul seems very happy to learn from James, Paul seems very happy to travel and meet with James, Paul seems very happy to honor and submit to James. He says this as well in Galatians 2:9, when James, and Cephas, and John, what a team. Jesus' brother, the leader of Jesus' disciples, and Jesus best friend, John is the one whom Jesus loved the Bible says, what a team, what a team. Jesus' brother, leader of the disciples, and best friend, the guy who at the cross he told John look after my mom. Nobody's closer relationally to Jesus than John. When James, Cephas or Peter, and John, who seemed to be pillars. Here's a nickname Paul gives them they're the pillars. You know what a pillar does? Carries a load. Not everybody has equal spiritual authority, not everybody carries the same load. If you're remodeling a house, and you say I'd like to take out that wall, and make it an open concept. First thing you've got to figure out is, is that a load-bearing wall? 'Cause if it is I take the wall down I kinda take everything down, right? What he's saying is these guys load-bearing. Boy on these three guys, and it's kinda humanly speaking the Holy Spirit's empowering them but these guys they're load-bearing, lot's riding and resting on them. One of them decides to betray the faith, or run off with another woman, or lose his mind, we've got a real problem. But he said they're pillars, they're like marble columns in the temple. They were there last year, they'll be there next year, they don't move, they are rock solid, they can handle a serious load, there are pillars, what a nickname. We could use a lot of men like that. "Perceived by the grace that was given to me, they gave me the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me that we should go to the Gentiles." This is staggering. Who came down converted Paul, and called him to be a missionary to the Gentiles, who did that? Jesus Christ. After Easter we're gonna get back into the book of Acts, and we're gonna study it. Even though Jesus came down, Jesus came down from heaven, he died for our sin, rose as our savior, ascended to heaven where he rules and reigns. One day he got off his throne, and came down for a short meeting with a guy named Saul. Blinded him, converted him, changed his name to Paul, said go preach to the Gentiles, and then Jesus went back to heaven. What Paul didn't do is walk around saying,

Jesus told me I get to plant a church, Jesus told me I get to write books, Jesus told me I get to preach sermons, that's what Jesus said. Here's what Paul says, I went to Jerusalem, and I sat down with James, and Peter, and John, and I brought Barnabas with me, and I told them here's what Jesus has done in my life, and here's what Jesus has called me to do with the rest of my life, and I submitted it to them for spiritual authority and oversight. Those of you who feel called to ministry, those of you who feel called to leadership, particularly those of you who feel called preaching, or church planting, you are not above Paul. You have no right to just say, well, God told me and I'm gonna go do it. No one had a more magnificent calling than Paul. Whatever calling you receive I tell you this, Jesus didn't come down from heaven to convert you and to call you. And even Paul receiving that direct calling from Jesus himself submitted to the authority that Jesus placed over him. There is no spiritual ministry apart from spiritual authority, there's not. Paul says I took what Jesus said and did, and I brought it to the men that Jesus appointed over me. Paul is saying I saw James as an authority over me, and Peter an authority over me, and John an authority over me. And before I preached, before I planted churches, and before I wrote books I asked them, do I have your blessing? 'Cause see God works through spiritual authority. There's nothing more dangerous than just a renegade leader who wants to go do their own thing and say Jesus told me, and I'm only accountable to him. It's dangerous, it's deadly, it's devastating, and sometimes damnable. Your authority, my authority is nowhere near Paul's authority, and he submitted his authority to higher authority, and so should we, so should we. When I felt called into ministry I went and met with my first pastor. I said I think this is what God's told me to do. He said I think that's right but you're nowhere near ready, it's gonna be a really long time, okay, I got a lot of work to do. When I felt called to plant I went through a full assessment, pastors oversaw me, a team interviewed me, a church sent me, an overseer had authority over me. The Bible talks about laying on of hands. What this is saying is that not only has God chosen this person but he's confirmed their calling through Godly leadership and authority over them. And placing a hand on somebody is demonstrating authority over somebody. And when leaders are installed in the Bible oftentimes it's through the laying on of hands. Here's what Paul's saying, there were six hands on me, can you see it? Peter put his two hands on me, prayed over me, James put his two hands on me, prayed over me, John put his two hands on me and prayed over me, and I'm called by Jesus but I'm sent by these men, and I'm under the authority of these men, and I give report to these men, and I return and meet with these men, and I submit to these men. Part of Paul's greatness was the greatness of his submission. It put him in a safe place where God could use him in a big way. Do you see that? We all need that myself included, perhaps myself more than anyone. And it's James, I mean, have you ever thought who did Paul's performance reveal? Well, that was a pretty good sermon and doing okay. Like who does your performance review? Who's gonna do Paul's performance review? James does Paul's performance review in Jerusalem. Paul travels to James, James doesn't travel to Paul, Paul travels to James. That's convening power, that spiritual authority, that's incredible leadership. Well, what happens to James from here? He continues to preach and teach. It's reported historically apart from scripture but it's the most accurate historical record we have that he was martyred around 62 or 63 AD. And he was Jesus bold little brother. Man, he stayed in Jerusalem, he stayed the course, he was a rock solid pillar, he did not move, he did not crumble. he did not tumble, he did not waver. In addition to the nickname that Paul

gave him the pillar of church history, the early church historians say that he had two other nicknames, James the just, what a name. It's like holy hunk, really? That's amazing. James the just, and his other nickname was camel knees. You know what that's from? Praying a lot. James was on his knees so much that his knees were hardened. So he's known as being a pillar, a righteous man who was always on his knees until they came to murder him. And history records that they took him to the top of the temple, this is supposed to be God's house, all foreshadowing the coming of Jesus, the presence of God, the sacrifice, the priest, it's all about Jesus. And they take James to the top of the temple, the religious leaders do, the same group, thinking team of religious leaders who murdered Jesus. Not everybody converts. Religious people sometimes are the worst. They murdered Jesus, he rose from the dead. You think they would have learned something, no. Instead they continue opposing Jesus' people after he's ascended back to heaven. They take James his brother, the leader of the church at Jerusalem. They bring them up to the pinnacle of the temple, and they throw them off to openly, publicly, shamefully murder him as they did his brother. And history records that he hit the ground, apparently pretty tough guy didn't die. So then they stone him, and beat him to death. Now the family's got another funeral. Mary buried some sons. And history records that James successor probably chosen by James was one of his other brothers. What a family. Kill the big brother, I'm here to preach. Kill that guy, well, we've got another brother. I wonder if they had beards and Duck on it, this is quite a family, this is quite a family. I mean they're pretty durable, amen, you get that feeling. That guy's name is Simeon or Simon, depending upon which historian you follow. What an amazing family this is. The brothers write books of the Bible, the brothers are willing to die, the brothers are willing to step in. How many of you if your brother died on the job you would not be a successor? This family is utterly convinced. Jesus is God, Jesus is savior, Jesus rose, you can kill us we'll go see him, it's gonna be okay. And if you're here and you're not a believer I have got to ask you how in the world do you account for this? What motive could they have possibly had? There was no fame, there was no glory, there was no fortune, there was death. And they endured it because they no longer feared death 'cause they'd seen their Godbrother conquer it. Now, what I don't want you to do is just admire this family. I want you to join this family. I'll close with the words of Jesus 'cause you can't do any better than that. Mark 3:35, "For whoever does the will of God he, Jesus says, is my brother, and sister, and mother." How many guys here you're like, man, it would have been great to have Jesus as a big brother. Jesus says I'll be your big brother do what I tell you to do, and I'll be your big brother. I'll love you, help you, encourage you, be there for you. I'll be your brother. How many of you ladies here and said, boy, it would have been great to have Jesus as a big brother. Jesus says I'll be your big brother do what I tell you to do. How many of you ladies say, man, it would have been amazing to be Mary, to be Jesus' mom? Jesus says I'll love you like I love my own mom if you'll obey me and do what I tell you to do. Jesus invites us into his family. You may not have been born into his family but you can be born again by the spirit of God into the family of God. And men Jesus is like a big brother, he puts an arm around and say, hey, we got stuff to do. Look at James, look at Jude, like we got stuff to do. Puts his arm around us, I'm your big brother, sisters come on support, we need you on the team you're very important. Older women you too you're like mothers super important we need you in the family you're a big deal, you got stuff to do. And James picks up this tenor and tone, and the book of James is all active, present tense

verbs, do this, do this, do this, do this, do this, do this, 'cause the family of God is seen by the works of God. If you're here and you're not a Christian the first thing you need to do you need to turn from sin and trust in Jesus. You need to cross that line of faith that James and his family crossed. They went from knowing him, knowing a little bit about him, kinda liking him, being concerned about other things, receiving certain teachings, struggling with others, to full-hearted, full-throated commitment to Jesus as God and savior. And I'm inviting you not to just admire Jesus' family but to join it. And you do so by turning from sin and trusting in him. For those of you that are here and you are Christians, the book of James is written largely to religious people who know a lot but they don't do a lot. And he's trying to move them from conviction to action, from belief to behavior. And for some of the religious people this is the perfect time of year, it's the new year. My question to you would be, what is Jesus commanding you to do? What is his will for you this year? What's on the to-do list from the risen Lord for your life starting right now? And some of you say, I don't feel close to Jesus like a brother, I don't feel close to Jesus like a sister, I don't feel close to Jesus like my mother, well then here's the issue, maybe you're not serving him, maybe you're not doing what he's doing, maybe you're not working where he's working, maybe you're not obeying where he's commanding. And it's not that he is far from you but that you're not in sync with him. And so I want you to sing, and celebrate the goodness of the Lord Jesus Christ. I want you to welcome new brothers and sisters into the family of God. And if you've never been baptized today's the day for you to be baptized in obedience to Jesus, to start your obedience through baptism. And you may say, I don't have a towel, I don't have shorts, I don't have a shirt. We do, Jesus told us you were gonna need them so we're all ready to go, amen. All right, let me pray. Father thank you that I get to teach the Bible. God I thank you that we get to go through books of the Bible. I thank you for the patience of our people as I take an hour plus a week. And God thank you so much that you work in and through people like us, families, people who have struggles and doubts, people who are in process, people who are radically changed and greatly used. God we thank you for the testimony of Jesus family. I pray that the ladies would be like Mary and his sisters. I pray that us men would be like his father Joseph, and his brothers guys like James and Jude. And God thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you for the Holy Spirit that he comes to empower us to live new lives as new people born again as part of God's family. And Jesus we come to sing and celebrate right now. And we know that James and Jude, Mary, your brothers, sisters, your father, Lord Jesus they're in your presence right now, they see you unveiled in full glory. They're rejoicing in who you are, and what you've done along with the angels. And we come now to join them, and to sing and celebrate in Jesus' great name, amen.