Introduction to the Book of James

- Encouragement to read James before next Sunday
- Personal anecdote about a coworker discouraging parenthood
- Importance of raising children in the ways of the Lord

Two Major Biblical Themes

- The way to God
- A walk with God

- Salvation comes through grace and faith in Jesus
- James focuses on how Christians walk with God after salvation
- Thoughts, words, and deeds as ingredients of daily walk with Christ

Overview of the Epistle of James

- One of the earliest general epistles written in the NT
- Other general epistles: 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude
- Practical living rather than doctrinal focus
- Jesus mentioned only twice; the cross not mentioned at all
- Central theme: genuine faith produces evidence in a believer's life

Spiritual Growth

- Parable of the Sower in Matthew as an illustration of varying growth
- Some believers grow rapidly; others remain spiritually stagnant

- Paul's prayers for spiritual growth
  - Filled with spiritual wisdom and understanding (Col 1:9-12)
  - Holiness and sexual purity (1 Thes 4:1-8)
  - Fruitfulness and good works (Col 1:9-12)
  - Resisting false teaching and speaking truth in love (Eph 4:11-16)

- Spiritual growth compared to physical growth and medical stages of life
- Value of periodic spiritual self-examination

- John's levels of Christian maturity: children, young men, fathers (1 Jn 2:12-14)
  - Children: sins forgiven, know the Father
  - Young men: strong, word of God abides in them, overcome the wicked one
  - Fathers: known Him from the beginning

- Strength associated with God's word, not physical ability
- Paul's exhortation to be strong in the Lord (Eph 6:10)

David's recognition that his strength came from God (Psa 144:1)
Getting older does not automatically mean growing spiritually

Suggested monthly spiritual growth journal questions
What trials did I face this month?
What temptations did I resist or fail to resist?
What did I learn about God?

Trials vs. Temptations

Trials are meant to refine; temptations are meant to destroy
Both can contribute to spiritual growth
Trials
Develop perseverance
Strengthen faith
Produce spiritual maturity
Examples: serious illness, job loss, persecution, marital seasons
Opportunities to trust God rather than abandon faith
Temptations
Draw a person toward sin and away from God
God never draws us toward sin
Examples: financial pressure leading to dishonesty, anger in response to insults, compromising convictions under opposition

James 1:1 -- Authorship and Background

Multiple men named James in the NT
James the son of Zebedee
Brother of John; fisherman
Part of Jesus' inner circle
Called a son of thunder
His mother requested seats of honor for him and John
Killed by Herod in Acts 12; ruled out as author

James the Less, son of Alphaeus
One of the Twelve; little known
Not generally regarded as the author

James the half-brother of Jesus
Most widely accepted as the author
Jesus' brothers named in Matt 13:55-56

James as the Half-Brother of Jesus
What it may have been like to be a sibling of Jesus
Jesus received both positive and negative attention
His brothers initially did not believe in Him (Jn 7:1-9)

Context: Feast of Tabernacles, Jewish leaders seeking to kill Jesus
Brothers urged Jesus to go public in Judea
John 7:5 confirms his brothers did not believe in Him

Physical closeness to Jesus did not produce automatic faith
Personal faith cannot be replaced by familiarity or upbringing
Jesus' response: His timing was governed by the Father's plan, not human suggestion
References to "the hour" throughout John's Gospel (Jn 2:4, 7:30, 12:23, 17:1)
The world did not hate His brothers as it hated Him

James came to faith after the resurrected Jesus appeared to him (1 Cor 15)
Post-resurrection involvement
Acts 1: James and brothers gathered with disciples for prayer
Gal 1: Paul identifies James as the Lord's brother
Gal 2: James recognized as a pillar of the Jerusalem church

James as leader of the early church, not Peter
Paul's first Jerusalem visit: met Peter and James (Gal 1:18-19)
Gal 2: James listed first before Cephas and John
Paul's charge to remember the poor came from James, Cephas, and John (Gal 2:10)
Peter's instruction after prison release: "Go tell these things to James" (Acts 12)
James presided over the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15)
Addressed the law vs. grace question for Gentile believers
James issued the verdict: "Therefore I judge"

Traditions surrounding James's death
Josephus: died at age 61 during an uprising
Other traditions: thrown from the temple, beaten with clubs, or stoned

James 1:1 -- The Term Bondservant

James identifies himself as a bondservant, not as Jesus' brother

Implications of the term bondservant
Absolute obedience to the master
Believers are slaves to Christ

Life before salvation described in Eph 2:1-5
Dead in trespasses and sins
Slaves to sin, the flesh, and the prince of the power of the air

Freedom in Christ means becoming a slave to a new master
Redemption illustrated through the Roman concept of being bought at a price
Illustration: poor man's shack

God does not want a patched-up self; He wants an empty life He can fill.

James, once an unbeliever, became a bondservant of Christ
Personal application: can you call yourself a bondservant of Christ?

Surrendering to the Lord

Peter's vision in Acts 10 and his response: "Not so, Lord"
The contradiction of refusing God while calling Him Lord
Danger of allowing traditions, assumptions, or personal preferences to override God's word
Closing question: Can we genuinely call Jesus Lord while refusing to obey Him?