

James 25-03-30a

Good afternoon. Welcome to the Sunday services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 30th of March, 2025.

We're continuing our new study in the Book of Jacob, the Epistle of Jacob, commonly known as James. Let's ask God's blessing on our time of fellowship and study. We will begin.

Father, we are thankful for another time of fellowship, of worship through music and through the investigation of the truth of your word. We ask that the Holy Spirit will minister to our hearts, help us to be an encouragement to each other, to be uplifted and blessed through the ministry of your Holy Spirit as we seek a better understanding and application of your word in our lives. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. We have gotten one word into our study of the Book of James, and that is James. We know this is Yaqobu or Yaqobas, Yaqob in Hebrew.

And the traditionally ascribed authorship is to James, the half-brother of the Lord. I disagree for reasons that we introduced last time. I would like to continue to point out the reasons why he is unlikely to be the author of this work, despite the traditional attribution otherwise.

To look at the history in Acts and what is recorded by the Apostle Paul is to find that James, the half-brother of the Lord, is not a model of understanding, of grace, of prayer, of fellowship, of leadership, and was actually an impediment and an obstacle in the days of the early church. And it seems very unlikely to me that God would suddenly place him as author. I believe the reason he is traditionally understood to be the author are the same reasons that he was recognized as leader in the early Jerusalem church.

That church was fraught with difficulties and eventually disbanded and scattered, despite efforts to hold it together. Let's begin by looking at the letter that Paul has written to the Galatians. If you'll turn with me to Galatians 1. We have here a convenient history from Paul's perspective.

Paul says in chapter 1, I make known to you brethren, beginning at verse 11, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. I neither received it from man nor was I taught it, but it came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. This is our theme this morning.

If for some reason the rest of the coverage of this portion of scripture was lost, this is the theme. The gospel that you and I live by, what we are guided by in our daily walk, whatever it may entail, employment, relationships, activities, tasks, responsibilities, challenges, blessings, whatever it entails, we are defined by the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, the good news of eternal life and ongoing relationship with the Father through him. That is who we are.

It isn't what people think. It isn't always even our own self-image or what we would like to think

about ourselves. We are defined by the good news of Jesus Christ.

That is what Paul says here. The gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. This is not human viewpoint.

It's not human ideas or philosophy, priorities. I didn't receive it from man. I was not taught it in verse 12.

It came through the revelation of Jesus Christ. That's why we are a Bible church. That's why we're looking together at God's word this morning.

We need to know God's viewpoint, God's good news for us. We are not driven by human expectations, or we should not be, or human ideas of what the priorities and values of life should be. Paul says, You have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.

I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation, being more exceedingly zealous for the traditions of my fathers. This can drive us. We are motivated and driven by expectations, by patterns that we have seen around us, by the normal quote-unquote parameters of human life.

There are expectations that have developed in recent days that did not pertain in the past. There were times past where we had an agrarian culture. One was expected to grow up and perhaps work on a farm or manage livestock.

As cities grew, people entered into manufacturing, and city life is defined by a certain amount of expectation, of provision, of society and culture in the same way that rural life was preceding that. We now are in the information age and moving beyond information into the times of artificial intelligence and things that are still to be seen coming over the horizon with the advent of this next generation of exponentially more powerful technology. It insinuates itself into many areas of our life.

We live at a faster pace. We have information flowing to us and past us and around us all the time. It is hard to find a person who doesn't look at their phone or a computer screen several times in an hour because there's a little tone.

I've got a text. I've got an alert. There is breaking news or somebody needs something from me.

Employees are receiving communication from their supervisors via these online methods, and we are distracted and we are driven to be functional cogs in the machine, to spin when the teeth engage and other wheels spin. We spin with them. It is so critical.

If you remember nothing else from this morning, we are not our own. We have been bought with a price and we are here to glorify God in our body, in our physical existence. We are here

for no other purpose.

Anybody can do a job. Anybody can accomplish a task that is reasonably proficient or has gained the skills. There are interchangeable parts in human society and culture, and any number of people can fulfill a part.

There are people with musical gifts, people with intellectual gifts, people with leadership gifts, people with task orientation and get-it-done-in-a-practical-fashion gifts. What makes you and I unique is our representation as servants of God. That is the next word in our text, yakov, slave.

It's so interesting to see the way this is introduced. Whichever Jacob or James you consider to be the author, whoever it is, he does not claim authority on the basis of commission or of relationship or of accomplishment, experience. His authority to communicate this word is slave.

Slave. What authority does a slave have? Think carefully now. This is bond slave.

This isn't the elevated oikodomeo sort of household manager, the high executive officer that may be in some sort of servitude, but has status and standing and influence. This is the lowest form of bond slavery. It has no redeeming qualities to it.

So what is the authority of a slave? Why would he begin the letter, James Dulos, of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ? What does that signify? What does it connote? You don't have to look at me. You don't have to look at the messenger to find traction for the message. I am here the way the angels of heaven come down to earth and communicate.

Don't have to know the angel's name. Most of the angels that appear in scripture are unnamed. What is their authority? Is it just that they are an angel? Satan masquerades as an angel of light.

There are fallen angels who do no end of damage. So it isn't angelic identity that confers authority. What is it? To the extent that someone serves faithfully, diligently, obeying every command and delivering every word that proceeds from the mouth of the master, the authority is in the message.

Once this messenger is established as a bond slave of God and the Lord Jesus Christ, we're not looking at him anymore. We are looking at the message that he brings as God's slave. His status and standing is his association with God the Father and with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This should be our basis for self-evaluation. Not by works of righteousness which we have done. It is according to his mercy that he saved us, that he redeemed us.

We are purchased with the precious blood of Christ and we belong to God. And we endeavor to represent him in everything we do, every conversation, every activity, every accomplishment, every investment of time, effort, resources. We are slaves of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our lives have meaning only as they reflect that connection. This book has meaning because it reflects that connection of the author. So we should, to the extent that we have healthy self-

esteem, we don't kick our toe in the dirt and say I'm unworthy, I shouldn't do anything, I'm unfit.

We have worth in Christ. We have standing and status because we are slaves of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. And we do what we do.

We live as we live at his behest in accordance with his plan and purpose and provision and for no other valid reason. Any other way to view ourselves is faulty. This is not the view of those who want to justify themselves by what they do.

I vindicate my existence. I establish my value and my standing, my reputation, how I am viewed in the eyes of others by who I am in relation to famous people, who I am in relation to important things. You hear that someone is a rocket scientist or they are an official of a well-known company and you say, oh, he's something because he works for that organization or he represents this entity or he is closely affiliated with this very well-known person.

That is not the biblical view. So who is this James who is the bond servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ? We have two apostles named Yaakov in Jesus' selected group. Who are they? Yaakov, the son of Zebedee, the brother of John, Ioannes, and we have Yaakov the Less, James the Less he's called in our English scriptures.

We have no indication that James the Less was a writing apostle as with the majority of the group. We know that the other son of Zebedee was prolific, wrote a gospel, three epistles, and the revelation. It would be passing strange for Peter to have a gospel and two epistles, John to have a gospel, three epistles, plus the revelation, and for James, the third member of that select party, to have no remnant whatsoever of his standing in that inner circle that went to the garden of Gethsemane with the Lord Jesus, that went to the upper room when the Lord Jesus raised the little girl from the dead, and so on.

Therefore, knowing also that the disciples of the Lord Jesus who became apostles were sent to Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria, and the apostle Paul is sent to the Gentiles, it would make sense that an apostle that is a part of the original twelve would be writing this letter. There is no indication that the Lord Jesus called, blessed, anointed, or otherwise gifted his half-brother Yaakov with status, standing, authority, or writing responsibilities as is traditionally thought to pertain here in this book. Why is this important? It goes to the theme this morning, which is, why do we do what we do? Who are we here to please? Turn with me to Galatians chapter 1. Paul says, I received this commission from the Lord Jesus.

You've heard of my former conduct. I advanced in Judaism beyond my contemporaries, Galatians 1.15, when it pleased God who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me through His grace to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles. Does Paul understand who his target audience is? Preach Him among the Gentiles.

I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those

apostles before me. I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. We know that Paul, on the Damascus road, was blinded.

He went, he saw Ananias, he had his blindness cured, he spoke to believers in the synagogues there, and then he disappeared for three years. He went to Arabia. And if you flip a few pages forward in Galatians, you will see Paul talk about, in chapter 4 verse 25, Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, corresponds to the Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

So if Paul went to Arabia, where would you suspect he would go in Arabia? What is the most prominent, meaningful location in Arabia? He gives it to us in 4.25, Mount Sinai. And it is commonly understood and believed, and I share that belief, that Paul went to Mount Sinai to settle the question of, what about the law? The law was given at Sinai, if the law is going to be set aside in favor of grace, if the law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, you can imagine Paul being schooled. How many years did the Lord Jesus teach the other eleven apostles, and prepare them for their apostolic ministry? What was the length of Jesus' earthly ministry with his disciples? Three years, right? Three to three and a half? How long was Paul in Arabia before he returned and conferred with anybody? Three years.

Where do you think he got the New Testament truth that he communicates so effectively in his letters? From the Lord Jesus, the same way the other apostles received it. This is an inference, but I think it's solid, I think it's well founded. So he details that time here in chapter one of Galatians.

Notice in verse 17, where did Paul go for affirmation, confirmation, and grounding in his apostolic calling? Where did he go? Did he say, well, I need to go play catch up, let me go find Peter and James and John and Philip and Bartholomew and so on? Where did Paul establish his apostolic identity? With the Lord Jesus at Mount Sinai in Arabia, three years before he ever conferred with the other apostles. Why? His identity, his calling is from the Lord Jesus personally, as is yours, as is mine. It is wonderful to have fellow believers who understand the word of God as we do and who approve and are fellow travelers on seeking to stay on the narrow road and head for the straight gate.

But this is not where we find our identity, our confirmation of who we are and why we're here. It is with the Lord Jesus. You cannot live your life to please people.

You cannot live our life to seek the approbation or the affirmation of people. We are not successful because somebody that we esteem thinks well of us. There's an old gospel song that says, where could I go but to the Lord? It is before the Lord that we stand or fall.

Remember, who are you to judge another man's servant? Before his own master, he will stand or fall. That's got to be our emphasis, our self-image. I stand before the Lord Jesus Christ.

I stand before my heavenly Father. What does he think? We're going to see how critically important this is as we review the authorship of this letter. So Paul says here that it pleased God

to call me through his grace in verse 16 of Galatians 1 to reveal his Son in me that I might preach him among the Gentiles.

I didn't confer with flesh and blood. I didn't go to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me. I went to Arabia and I returned again to Damascus.

After three years, after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to see Cephas, Cephas, Peter. I remained with him two weeks and a day, 15 days. I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord's brother.

James, the Lord's brother didn't see John, didn't see Yaakov or James, the son of Zebedee, saw none of the other apostles. He saw Peter and he saw the half-brother Jerusalem, James. The things which I write to you, Paul says, before God, I am not lying.

I am not a second generation apostle. Peter didn't lay hands on me and bless me and make me an apostle. Think about the Damascus Road experience.

Could God have sent Peter or Peter and James and John or any of the other disciples and laid hands on Paul and given him a commission? Paul is at pains here. Galatians is a book about understanding the role of the law and not being tripped up by it. You are running well.

Who tripped you is in this letter. I am writing to you that I have a direct commission from God to speak on this topic. Afterward, after he saw Peter and the half-brother of the Lord in Jerusalem, he went to the regions of Syria and Cilicia, unknown by face to the churches of Judea in Christ.

They heard, he who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy, and they glorified God in me because of me. It is a wonderful thing. Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas and took Titus with me.

I went up by revelation. I was told to go to Jerusalem. I went up to Jerusalem because God told me to, by revelation.

And I communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run or had run in vain. Verse 6, But from those who seemed to be something, whatever they were, it makes no difference to me. God shows no personal favoritism.

God is no respecter of persons. At this point Paul says to the Galatians, It did not matter to me whether they accepted me or not. I went there and explained the gospel that I preached to the Gentiles, which is the gospel of salvation by faith, righteousness by faith, by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

That is the gospel I preach. But notice he emphasizes twice in verse 6 of Galatians 2, those who seemed to be something. Now if you are something or not, who makes that actual

determination? This would be God.

We are only something if God says we're something. If we are nothing, it's because God says you are nothing. You have failed in faith, you failed in obedience, you're sidelined, you're pulled off the field, you're sent to the locker room.

So if someone seems to be something, who is Paul talking about here? These are those who were held in esteem by those in Jerusalem who are respecters of persons. So who's he talking about? Who is the leader of the Jerusalem church that Paul had seen 14 years earlier? Some people say that the three years and the 14 years are both measured from his conversion. It works a little better in the chronology.

It doesn't really matter. There was well over a decade from his first trip to Jerusalem where he met with Peter and Jerusalem James and this second visit. By the time he comes the second time, there are those who are held in esteem by the Jerusalem church.

They seem to be something. Paul said, I don't care if the people in Jerusalem think they are something or not. I have my commission from God.

So they seem to be something, whatever they were, it doesn't make any difference to me. And this is how we should all think. Just because someone has letters after their name, just because they've got a TV program or published a lot of books, just because they are well known in circles or because we're in a group that thinks highly of them, it shouldn't matter to us.

There is only one measure by which we stand or fall, by which we are something or we are nothing. Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. God resists the proud.

God gives grace to the humble and the esteem of people has to be carefully discounted, whether good or bad. So verse six, again, of chapter two, I cannot emphasize enough how important this is from those who seem to be something, whatever they were, it makes no difference to me. God shows personal favoritism to no man.

Just because you're the, you came from the family of Mary and Joseph and you're the half brother of the humanity of the Lord Jesus, doesn't make you something. But that is how James of Jerusalem came to be the leader of that church. Mere relationship in the physical realm.

Well, he must be holy. Look at his family. He was accepted.

He was promoted. He was revered. He was granted authority and people deferred to him because he grew up in the same household as the Lord Jesus.

This is a bad basis for acknowledgement or for submission or granting of some kind of authority. It's a horrible basis. Who do you think Paul is talking about here? Is Peter something? Absolutely.

The Lord Jesus commissioned him. On this rock, I will build my church. Flesh and blood has not

revealed this to you, but my father in heaven.

And the emboldened Peter, after his failure the night of the crucifixion, becomes hugely significant and important because he is obedient to his calling. Those who seem to be something, but aren't, Paul says. God shows no favoritism.

And then again, toward the end of the verse, he says, those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. My apostleship, my message, my ministry, my communication is based on servanthood to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. What people think doesn't impinge on the calling of God, which he detailed earlier in chapter 1. On the contrary, verse 7 of chapter 2, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me.

How many times has Paul emphasized now? He is the apostle to the Gentiles. He said it in chapter 1. He says it again here. The gospel to the uncircumcised was committed to me, just as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter.

For he who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised, what is the authority? How is Peter recognized? Is it by common consent, by approbation? Did they take a straw poll and say, well, let's recognize Peter? My question is, why doesn't the Jerusalem church reflect Peter as its leader? How did James, the half-brother of the Lord, end up being the leader of that group instead of Peter, whom the Lord Jesus specifically said, the rock of your affirmation of the Christ, the Son of the living God, that's what I will build my ecclesia on. But the ecclesia isn't built on Peter's confession of faith or Peter himself. Peter gives testimony and Jesus of Jerusalem makes the final decision in Acts 15.

It's wacky. It's not right. That's not God's order.

That's not what the Lord Jesus said. The Lord Jesus could have looped his half-brother into the group had he so desired. Who put James in charge of the Jerusalem church? Not God.

There is no indication anywhere that God sent word to a New Testament prophet or to Peter, James or John or anyone else to say, put the Lord's half-brother in charge of the church. This was a human operation because he seemed to be something. Paul said, I'm not buying it.

Doesn't matter to me. And he added nothing to me. But on the contrary, they saw the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me.

Why? He who worked effectively, verse eight, in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles. You've got Peter and those who are with Peter, he's the leader of the disciple group, had been when the Lord was on the earth and remains so. Paul is going to be the leader of the group, including Barnabas, Titus, Timothy, Silas, and others, Tychicus, Sopater.

There's a whole list of those who are fellow workers in the vineyard to the Gentiles, Aquila and Priscilla and so on. But Paul is their leader, the way Peter was supposed to be the leader in

Jerusalem. Something happens to Peter and he does not ensure the security of the Jerusalem church.

But he who worked effectively in Peter for apostleship to the circumcised worked effectively to me toward the Gentiles. And when James, Cephas, and John, James, Peter, and John, this is James, the Lord's half-brother, who seemed to be pillars. Why would Paul say this? Why doesn't he just say they were pillars? Think about this.

Why does Paul say James and Peter and John seemed to be pillars? Why would he say that? Seeming to be something is not the same as being something. So there is some sort of malfunction. I would suggest that James, mentioned first, wasn't supposed to be a pillar, but he was treated as such by the rest of the church.

Peter and John, who should have been pillars, did not step up to be pillars. They were respected, obviously, but they are not functioning as pillars. They were considered as pillars, they were listened to, but they are not actually holding up the structure of the church.

All three of these individuals. And you have to wonder about John. But John was young.

He's often and traditionally thought to have been the youngest of the disciples. And he may have had the Timothy issue where he was reluctant to stand up and speak or to correct his elders, his older brother James, Peter, and so on. But for whatever reason, these three seemed to be pillars.

It doesn't say they were pillars. They perceived the grace that had been given to me and they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship that we should go to the Gentiles. This is the third time in Galatians.

Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. He has the word for the Gentiles. He has the authority to tell them what they should and should not do in terms of living a life dedicated to the Lord Jesus Christ, reflecting their relationship with God the Father through Christ.

That's Paul's message. That's Paul's job. Peter is responsible for the in Jerusalem.

Does he fulfill that responsibility or not? Paul is the apostle to the Gentiles. Does he fulfill that responsibility or not? These are critical background issues for what we're going to see in our second session this morning. But what is the point? It is not enough to be considered a faithful believer or to be well thought of by those that we think well of.

There is only one measure by which we can be judged faithful, obedient, genuine slaves of the Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is what is God's opinion. You cannot go by man. Man looks on the outward appearance.

The Lord looks on the heart. We may be misunderstood. Our motives may be misconstrued.

We may be falsely elevated to a place we don't need or want to occupy. We may be denigrated

in an unjust, unfair fashion. You cannot be dependent on the opinions of people, good or bad.

There is only one measure. What does God say? That's all that counts, and anything else is subjectivity. It will deflect us.

It will reduce our effectiveness. It will imprison us. It will distract us from the representation of God the Father and the Lord Jesus that we are here to maintain.

We must be diligent. Apostles themselves have been tripped up in this regard, both Peter and Paul, as we will see when we come back from the break.