

Sincere Faith:

An Exposition of the Book of James

Sermon One: A Sincere Introduction

May 16, 2021

Opening ILL: Sometimes things just don't pass the sniff test. Let me ask you this: Imagine you grab a gallon of milk from the fridge, you open it up and it just doesn't smell right. Do you look at the expiration date and say, (1) "Well, this says I have 3 more days." Or, (2) do you say, "I don't care what that date says, it just doesn't smell right, or (3) do you ask your spouse, "Honey? Does this smell ok to you?" See, sometimes it's not that things are rotten, they're just a little off.

Quote: "It is vain to shut our eyes to the fact that there is a vast quantity of so-called Christianity nowadays which you cannot declare positively unsound, but which, nonetheless, is not full measure, good weight and sixteen ounces to the pound. It is a Christianity in which there is undeniably something about Christ, something of grace, something about faith, and something about repentance and something about holiness; but it is not the real thing as it is in the Bible."

J. C. Ryle, "Holiness", page 13

I. A Sincere Introduction to the Book of James

Point: We have to be careful here not to get too bogged down in the details. While I love a good, academic discussion as much as the next guy, I will pass lightly over these things. After all, why spend 40 minutes convincing you that James wrote the book of James?

A. Who wrote the book?

1. James, the brother of our Lord.
2. What are some of the reasons why (again, without getting bogged down:
 - a. James was one of the key leaders of the Jerusalem church (See Acts 15).
 - b. James was particularly focused on the Jewish people.
 - c. James was particularly scrupulous about the law and conduct.

B. To whom did he write?

1. To the twelve tribes—Jewish professing believers.
2. The dispersed ones—Scattered Jewish professing believers.

C. Why does James write this letter?

1. There is always a purpose in every book of the Bible.
 - a. That is to say that no book of the Bible is simply the musings of its earthly author.
 - b. Every book of the Bible is written:
 - i. To teach something that is necessary to the recipients of the letter.
 - ii. To correct something bad, whether it be bad behavior or false doctrine.
 - iii. To celebrate or to encourage something good, whether it be good doctrine or good behavior.
 - iv. Some combination of these.
 - c. Discovering that purpose is the key to properly interpreting the book.
 - i. Or anything, for that matter.

Point: Sometimes knowing what people are trying to do helps you give the benefit of the doubt when things sound unbalanced. Not every sermon, article, or even every single book of the Bible, give you a complete view of what is required of you. Remember, this book was written to correct bad behavior, not bad theology, so James' focus will be much more on how you conduct yourself than what you believe. Remember, though, James was an Apostle who gave his life for the doctrine of the Gospel.

- d. The way we discern the purpose is by looking at the book as a whole.
 - i. We look at the parts to discern the basic theme.
 - ii. Then we read back the basic theme into our understanding of the parts.
2. Some unsatisfying answers to this question:
 - a. Some say that James is a general, propositional book for Christian living.

- i. This would make the book of James the New Testament book of Proverbs.
 - ii. This would say that the book of James is a collection of propositions without a specific, central purpose.
 - iii. The problem with that is that, when we look closely, a clear, specific and central theme emerges.
- 3. The Necessary answer—Because something wasn't passing the sniff test.
 - a. There was a tendency in the new, Jewish churches to fall into some of the bad patterns of behavior that James hopes to correct in his book.
 - b. These failures...these lapses...made it apparent to James that something just wasn't right.
 - i. On the one hand, the people were claiming to love, obey and follow the Lord.
 - ii. On the other hand, they were really behaving poorly. This poor behavior called their sincerity into question.
 - iii. The faith they were claiming to have did not show up properly in the lives of many of the people in these new, Jewish/Christian church communities.
 - iv. Because of this, James (and God) felt the need to challenge them...to correct them.
- 4. Is James "practical" or "doctrinal"?
 - a. We often hear that James is simply a practical book, designed to show us Christian living.
 - b. We need to remember that, for a Christian:
 - i. All doctrine is practical.
 - ii. All practice is doctrinal.
 - c. In light of this, I think it would be a mistake to simply say that James is focused on conduct and nothing else.

D. A Sincere Caution

Point: There are two extremes in church life that make our focus in the book of James particularly problematic. Let's be aware of this as much as we can, so that these things can be truly helpful to us.

- 1. **Extreme #1**—Easy believism.
 - a. Easy believism is the idea that so long as I make a profession of faith and claim some sort of belief, it doesn't really matter how I live.
 - b. These people are fully assured of their salvation...they are unbothered and unruffled in their consciences, but a sincere look at their heart and life might make them a little uneasy.
 - c. James is writing to correct this extreme.
- 2. **Extreme #2**—Uneasy believism (or Queasy believism)
 - a. Uneasy believism (or what I like to call "Queasy believism") is the restlessness of a sincere soul that never really achieves assurance.
 - b. These people are always struggling with whether or not they are truly saved.
 - c. Sometimes, in the effort to correct "easy believe-ism," we can fall into this trap.

ILL: Before I went to seminary, my pastor at the time once said, "If you struggle with the same sin three weeks in a row, you are not a Christian. I remember thinking, "Then I am not one, and I have never met one." See? In his zeal for obedience, he went too far. Beloved, we must avoid this like the plague!

- d. For these people, books like James can be really difficult.
 - i. Why? Because they already never feel like they do enough, and the book of James will challenge us to do.

II. A Sincere Introduction to a Sincere Faith

A. What do you mean by, "Sincere Faith"?

- 1. Word study on the English word, "Sincere".
 - a. From etymonline.com: 1530s, "pure, unmixed," from French sincere (16c.), from Latin sincerus, of things, "whole, clean, pure, uninjured, unmixed," figuratively "sound, genuine, pure, true, candid, truthful," of uncertain origin. The ground sense seems to be "that which is not falsified." Meaning "free from pretense or falsehood" in English is from 1530s.
- 2. Word study on the Greek word *diyucoj* "double souled".
 - a. What does this word mean?
 - i. BDAG: "pert. to being uncertain about the truth of someth., doubting, hesitating, lit. double-minded."

- b. What does this mean to us?
 - i. Are you double-minded?
 - ii. Are you “yes” and “no”?
 - iii. Are you “hot” and “cold”?

Important Point: This is true of all of us some of the time. However, it may be that this is true of some of us all of the time.

Quote: Were a stranger to judge of me by what I sometimes say in the pulpit, he might think that, like the angels, I had but two things in view, to do the will of God, and to behold his face. But, alas! ... I hope Satan will never be able to persuade me that I am a mere hypocrite and stage-player; but sure I am, that there is so much hypocrisy in me, so many littlenesses and self-seekings insinuating into my plan of conduct, that I have humbling cause to account myself unworthy and unprofitable, and to say, "Enter not in to judgment with thy servant, O Lord."
John Newton, Works 1:491

B. What are the signs of an insincere faith?

1. Falling apart when we face trials.
 - a. Specific passages:
 - i. 1:2-4
 - ii. 1:12-15
 - iii. 5:9-11, 13-15
 - b. Instead, James encourages endurance.
 - i. James 1:3, 4
 - ii. James 5:11
2. Just going through the motions
 - a. Insincere prayers—James 1:6-8; 4:3
 - b. Insincere Bible reading—James 1:21-27
3. Pride and arrogance
 - a. See 1:9-11
 - b. 4:6
 - c. 4:13-16
 - d. 5:12
4. Anger
 - a. 1:19-20
5. Favoritism and Partiality
 - a. 2:1-9
6. Disobedience
 - a. Sometimes we pick and choose what we will obey—James 2:10-14
7. Neglect of the needy
 - a. 1:27
 - b. 2:14-16
 - c. 5:4
8. Lust
 - a. 4:1-5
 - b. 1:13-16
9. Knowing what the right thing is, and...just...not...doing it.
 - a. 4:17
 - b. 1:22
10. Evil Speech
 - a. James 1:26
 - b. James 3:1-11

C. Why is James focusing on these things?

1. Because he loves his people.
2. Because he loves his God.

III. A Sincere Call to Action—Applications/Implications

- A. Make up your mind that you will embrace the picture James (and God) paints of human nature.
- B. Make up your mind that you will not be content with anything less than a sincere faith.
 - 1. Refuse to be double-minded, double souled, double tongued, double dead!
- C. Make up your mind that you will read and consider the Book of James for what it is, the authoritative word of God.
- D. Make up your mind that you will see the rebukes of the Book of James for what they are intended to be.
 - 1. As a means of disciplining those who refuse to obey.
 - 2. As a means of encouraging those who seek to obey.

Closing Quote: Valley of Vision

I neglect prayer,

By thinking I have prayed enough and earnestly,

By knowing thou hast saved my soul.

Of all hypocrites, grant that I may not be

an evangelical hypocrite,

Who sins more safely because grace abounds,

Who tells his lusts that Christ's blood cleanseth them,

Who reasons that God cannot cast him into hell, for he is saved,

Who loves evangelical preaching, churches, Christians, but lives unholily.

Give me a broken heart that yet carries home the water of grace.

Valley of Vision, "paradoxes" page 128-129