

## James the Brother of Jesus

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Rich Nathan  
December 9-10, 2006  
Advent Series  
Galatians 1.19

We are in the Advent season, which is, according to the church calendar, the time of preparation for the coming of the Lord into the world at Christmas. Advent comes from a Latin word, “adventus.” It means approach, or coming. Advent is a time of preparation where the Christian church historically has prepared itself to celebrate the coming of the Lord into the world.

Now, this year as our Advent Series, we have been looking at the family of Jesus. We began a couple of weeks ago looking at the cousin of Jesus, John the Baptist. Last week we looked at Joseph, the father of Jesus. Today, we are going to focus attention on the brothers of Jesus, specifically one brother, James. Next week we will look at Jesus’ mother, Mary and finally, on Christmas Eve we will consider Jesus himself.

The reason to consider the family of Jesus – his cousin, his father, his brother James, and his mother Mary is because each of these serves as an example or model for us as Christians. There are things about their lives that we can imitate as followers of Christ.

The person we are going to look at today is a man the English Bible calls James. This man who we call James would never have responded to that name, if you called it out on a street in Jerusalem in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Back then James was known as Jacob, named for the great Jewish patriarch, Jacob, and also named for his own grandfather, Jacob. In the same way, of course, Jesus would probably not have responded on the street, if you called out the name Jesus. He was named, of course, for another famous Old Testament leader, Joshua. But these names, James instead of Jacob, and Jesus instead of Joshua, come to us through the Greek form of the names rather than their Jewish Hebrew forms and so we know these folks today as James and Jesus, at least in the English language.

Now, who was James?

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A member of Jesus’ family.

When you ask the question: ‘Who was James?’ you are immediately plunged into a major controversy in Christian history. There are many references in the Bible to James as the brother of Jesus, or sometimes there are just references to the

brothers and sisters of Jesus. For example, we read in Mark 6.3, in reference to Jesus:

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*Mk 6:3 Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him.*

If we looked down this list, by the way, it was the custom of 1<sup>st</sup> century Judaism to list sons in their birth order, so we find James as being the oldest of Jesus' younger brothers.

But we find other references to the Lord's brothers in texts like John 2.12,

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*After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.*

And John 7.3-5,

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*Jn 7:3 Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. <sup>4</sup> No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." <sup>5</sup> For even his own brothers did not believe in him.*

Paul refers to the Lord's brothers in 1 Corinthians 9.5,

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*Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?*

Telling us, apparently, that those called the Lord's brothers and Cephas, who was otherwise known as Peter, were married men. And the apostle Paul specifically names James the Lord's brother in Galatians 1.19,

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*I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord's brother.*

We have, in other words, nearly a dozen references to the brothers of the Lord in the New Testament. That would seem to settle the matter, but as we are going to find out next week, beginning in about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century some church leaders began to teach that Jesus' mother, Mary, was a virgin until her death. In other words, not only was Mary a virgin when Jesus was born, but according to this

church teaching in about the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, Mary had no other children and never had sexual relations with her husband, Joseph.

So how has much of the church accounted for people like James and his brother, Jude, and his sisters? Well, in the Eastern Orthodox part of the church, a belief began to grow that these brothers of Jesus were actually sons of Jesus' adoptive father, Joseph, by a prior marriage. So the idea was that Joseph was a much older widower when he married Mary and brought to that marriage sons from his prior marriage and he and Mary never consummated their marriage.

You see this idea in some Greek Orthodox mosaics and paintings. Occasionally, you will see a picture of a pregnant Mary on a donkey going to Jerusalem. In the front there is an older boy who is meant to portray James; and, in the back there is the father, Joseph.

Now this view that the brothers of Jesus were Joseph's by a prior marriage is really unlikely. It finds no support in the Bible. We have no reference to a prior marriage of Joseph. And it doesn't show up in the history of the church until at least 2 centuries after the birth of Jesus. But this is now the generally accepted Greek Orthodox view.

The Roman Catholic view is different altogether. The Roman Catholic view was made popular by a great biblical scholar and translator, who lived in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, named Jerome. Again, in order to protect this idea that Mary was a virgin until her death, Jerome taught that the brothers and sisters of Jesus were actually his cousins. He created a very elaborate teaching regarding why the Greek word for brother, which is the word "adelphoi" could include a wider circle such as cousins. Jerome argued that James the author of the book of James, and the leader of the church in Jerusalem was none other than one of the 12, James the son of Alphaeus, also known as James the Less. This very common Roman Catholic view that James, Jude, and whoever is mentioned in Mark 3.31 were actually not the brothers of the Lord, but the cousins of the Lord is also very unlikely, at least to me. The view appears very late in the history of the church. Its sole purpose appears to be to defend the perpetual virginity of Mary. And it runs into the very obvious obstacle that if the Bible writers wanted to tell us that James was a cousin of Jesus and not a brother, they was an available Greek word to communicate that. The Greek word for cousin is not "aldelphoi," but it is "anepsioi." In fact, outside of the New Testament we have some very early Christian documents telling us about the Lord's brothers on the one hand, and the Lord's cousins on the other.

So I think the most natural reading of the many, many Bible verses regarding the Lord's brothers is that James, the author of the book of James, and Jude, the author of the New Testament book of Jude, were the Lord's brothers through Jesus' mother, Mary, and were sons of Joseph through the natural

consummation of their marriage and through the natural birth of sons and daughters.

But the key for us today is not this ancient controversy that has been fought in the church for 1600-1700 years. It is considering James as a model for us of Christian faith. And before we look at the scriptures together concerning James, the brother of the Lord, let's take a moment to pray.

As I said, James was a member of Jesus' family. But James was also:

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A member of Jesus' redefined family.

With all the attention we are paying this Advent to Jesus' family, it is important to remember that Jesus defined his family differently than we define our families in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. You know, Jesus redefined just about everything for the Jews of his day. He redefined greatness as servanthood. He has said,

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*"Whoever would be great among you must be servant of all and slave of all."*

He redefined the Jewish Temple as his own body. We read in John 2.19-21 these words:

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*Jn 2:19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."*

*20 They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"*

*21 But the temple he had spoken of was his body.*

He redefines salvation as requiring faith not just in God, but in himself as God's Son. We read this in John 3.16-18

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*Jn 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.*

And just as Jesus redefined everything else, Jesus also redefined what family meant to him and what it meant for his followers. Here is what we read in Mark 3:31-35,

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*Mk 3:31 Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. <sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, "Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you."*

*<sup>33</sup> "Who are my mother and my brothers?" he asked.*

*<sup>34</sup> Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

Now these words were shocking to the Jewish audience that heard them. There was nothing in ancient Judaism that was more important than your responsibility to your own family. But Jesus redefines family and says, "Let me tell you who is on the inner circle of my family – whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."

Now this redefinition of family is a wonderful encouragement for those of us who are single, and for those of us who are estranged from our families, or those of us who live a considerable distance from our families. Marlene and I can personally bear witness to the truth of Jesus' words regarding the redefined family in our own lives. My family lives in New York and California. I have a sister who has been living down in the Caribbean for the last decade. Marlene was an only child. For the past 30 years our family, apart from our children, really has been this church. It is with other church members that we have connected weekly in a small group. It is folks in the church that we go to dinner with and who have helped us move and have visited us in the hospital when we were sick. It is people in the church who have supported us through the loss of Marlene's parents, and the challenges of pastoring a large church, and the ups and downs of our own natural family. We have absolutely experienced the truth of Jesus' redefinition of family when he said:

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*Mk 3:34 Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! <sup>35</sup> Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother."*

And, friend, if you haven't experienced the redefined family of Christ, you need to make a New Year's resolution that in the year of 2007: I am going to connect with one of the groups here at Vineyard Columbus and find in that group family relationships.

There are a few other passages that I would like to call attention to regarding Jesus' redefinition of family. We read these words in Matthew 10:34-37,

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*Mt 10:34 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to turn " 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— <sup>36</sup> your enemies will be the members of your own household.' <sup>37</sup> "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

And we read this in Luke 11:27-28,

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*Lk 11:27 As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." <sup>28</sup> He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."*

For Jesus nothing and no one, not mother, or father, or sister, or brother, son, or daughter, not even wife – nothing and no one ought to be as important to a person as in the Kingdom of God. It is so important that we reflect on verses like Matthew 10:37,

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*Mt 10:37 "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*

Especially for us as 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians. You see, the church in America often addresses a problem with teaching and then it creates another problem because it over-corrects the first problem. So, for example, we have a problem in America. We have lots of men and women who worship at the altar of career. They are subject to the sin of what I would call careerism. Many men and women will do anything for the sake of their careers. They will work 60-70-80 hours a week; they will neglect their children; they will neglect their marriages; they have no time for friendships; they have no time to work out; they have no time to serve in the church; they have no time for personal prayer or Bible study. Everything in life, their families, their physical health, their spiritual health, their service to others is sacrificed at the altar of career. And some of you know people like this. And some of you are people like this.

But in America we have folks chasing career advancements, and moving their families from one city to another over and over and over again. So Christians in America have appropriately confronted this idol of careerism and there has been lots of discussion in the Christian world over the last 25 years that has focused attention on the nuclear family. And this teaching has helped to remind us that

God calls us to love and serve our spouses and to train up our children to be followers of Christ.

But focus on the family can result in over-focus on the family. And our correction of one problem can result in over-correction of another. And in much Christian teaching right now, and in many Christian families there is an idealization of family so that we hear things like: "To me, family is everything. My marriage is #1. My kids are above everything else. I would sacrifice anything on the altar of family."

Friend, there is only supposed to be one #1 in your life and it is not your career; it is not the pursuit of money; but, it is not your family either. The #1 pursuit in your life is supposed to be God and his kingdom. This is what we read in Matthew 6.33,

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*Mt 6:33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*

You and I are called to set our hearts fully on the pursuit of God and the promotion of God's way and God's will in this world. And I believe, friends, that this over-focus on the family in some parts of the Christian church and in some of our homes and some of our lives has actually resulted in damage to our marriages and damage to our families.

You know, I see so many Christians struggling with disappointment in their marriages. And there are many, many Christians who choose to radically sin against God by violating their covenant with God and their covenant with their spouse by ending their marriages without biblical grounds because their marriages are challenging, because their marriages are hard.

I've said this many times to you, but marriages, and even Christian marriages, can be laid upon a spectrum. Some marriages are very easy; some marriages are easy; some marriages are challenging; and some marriages are very challenging; and some marriages are very, very challenging. And if you are in a very, very challenging marriage, it doesn't necessarily mean that you are not a follower of Christ, or that you are doing something wrong. Sometimes we carry into our marriages emotional scars from the past. Sometimes we struggle with illnesses or financial problems, or job problems outside of our control. Sometimes we have the added weight of a radically ill child or parent, or the struggle with depression, or some other emotional illness.

But if you are in one of those challenging, or very challenging marriages, if you would say, "You know, for me marriage is not a level 10 experience. At best, it is a level 3 experience," what should you do? Well, of course you should continue

to work on your relationship to the extent that it is possible to improve your marriage.

But let me give you advice that is a little bit different than the current idealizing of marriage and the idealizing of family. If you are a follower of Christ, you say to yourself, "My marriage and my family is not the be-all and end-all of my life. My life does not revolve around my marriage, or my kids. My life revolves around Jesus Christ and his kingdom." Say to yourself, "I can live a joyful life, I can live a good life, I can live a satisfying, hopeful, full, blessed life whatever my nuclear family is like because I am a follower of Jesus and Jesus has redefined family for me."

I am not talking about denial here. You say, "My marriage is not what I wish it would be. Sometimes I am very disappointed. I am a single parent and I would love to find someone to marry, but I haven't yet. I'm a single person and I would love to find a companion to do life with, but I haven't found that person God has for me yet. But that's OK, I can still be joyful because I have my brothers and sisters in the church. I'm making a contribution to the kingdom of God. I am serving other people. I'm serving in the church." You can say to yourself, "Every day when I wake up, I've got God as my Father, Jesus as my older Brother, and the Holy Spirit as my comforter, and I've billion and a half brothers and sisters worldwide. I can get through today. Even better, I'm not just a survivor, I can go through this day joyfully because I've got an amazing family."

Can you say that? I can go through today joyfully because I've got a great family. I've got the church. I've got Jesus' family as my brothers and sisters. Whatever my natural family is like, I've got a great family.

Now, how did James move from being a natural brother of Jesus to becoming a spiritual brother bound to Jesus by the eternal cords of the Holy Spirit? It is clear from the gospels that Jesus' brothers were not followers of Jesus during his earthly ministry. In John 7:3-5 we read,

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*Jn 7:3 Jesus' brothers said to him, "Leave Galilee and go to Judea, so that your disciples there may see the works you do. 4 No one who wants to become a public figure acts in secret. Since you are doing these things, show yourself to the world." 5 For even his own brothers did not believe in him.*

We don't find any of Jesus' brothers standing by the cross. And Jesus, after his death on the cross, was not buried in a family grave as would be expected in 1<sup>st</sup> century Jewish custom. It appears from the New Testament that during much of Jesus' ministry on earth, he was estranged from his natural family. His brothers and sisters were distant from him. They were even ashamed of him. And Jesus' death on a cross was the final shame. When Jesus died on the cross, the likely



response of his brothers and sisters would have been: All of our worst fears about our older brother have been realized. James was not a follower of Jesus during Jesus' earthly ministry.

Well, when did James come to faith in Jesus as his Messiah and his Lord?

The most likely possibility was that he came to faith through his encounter with the risen Christ. Here is what we read in 1 Cor. 15.3-8,

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*1Co 15:3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.*

Like the apostle Paul and Peter who renounced Jesus, James was converted and became a follower of Jesus by seeing Jesus resurrected from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus was the shattering event in James' life, in the life of Paul, in the life of Peter, and in the life of the early church. It was the resurrection of Jesus that brought James, his brother, to faith.

Now, let me speak to those of you who are not yet followers of Jesus. Oh, you may go to church; you may have been baptized as an infant or later on; you may take communion. But in your heart of hearts, between you and God, you know that you do not follow Jesus as the Lord of your life. Friend, what is going to be the thing in your life that will bring you to Christ? What's it going to take for you to say, "I need to turn my life over to Jesus Christ. I'm going to surrender to Christ and follow him as my Lord." What's it going to take?

You know, God often uses difficulties in our lives, things we can't overcome in our own strength to cause us to look beyond ourselves to the only one who is big enough to rescue us. Are you facing something in your life right now, friend, that is too big for you to handle on your own – an addiction, depression, a divorce, a separation, an illness, cancer, a problem with a family member, financial or legal trouble? Is there anything in your life that is too big for you to handle? Have you ever looked at your life and said, "You know, I'm pretty successful. Things have worked out pretty well for me. I've got a decent job; I've got some money. But inside I am dissatisfied." Have you ever looked at your life and said, "There's got to be something more than just grinding away at work; getting up in the morning and doing the same thing day after day. Is this all there is to life?"

Have you ever asked that question?

I believe difficulty in your life and dissatisfaction with your life are occasions for you to reevaluate where you are with God and to make a decision of faith in following Christ. James had a turning point in his life. James moved from unbelief to belief. And you, friend, can have a turning point in your life where you move from unbelief to belief; from going your own way to going Christ's way. It is time for you to turn your life over to Christ.

As I said, only three people are singled out in 1 Cor. 15 concerning individual encounters with the risen Christ – Peter, James and Paul. Now, each of these three men are given a very different leadership role in the early church. Peter became the apostle to the Jews. Paul became the apostle to the Gentiles. Here is what we read in Galatians 2.7,

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*Gal 2:7 On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews.*

In other words, Peter was a traveling missionary to Jewish people throughout the Roman Empire. The apostle Paul was a traveling missionary to Gentile people throughout the Roman Empire. Both Peter and Paul have had the brightest spotlights shining on them by the New Testament writers and subsequent church history. Peter is found all through the gospels as the chief spokesperson for the 12 apostles. Paul dominates the second half of the book of Acts. Peter wrote two New Testament letters. Paul wrote 13 letters.

And then there is James. The third person singled out in 1 Cor. 15 for an appearance by the risen Christ. James wrote only one New Testament book – the book of James. Subsequent history has not, as I said earlier, been that kind to him. It's even denied that he was the Lord's brother. In Roman Catholic tradition, he is called James the Less to distinguish him from James the son of Zebedee who is called James the Great. And James was not given the exciting ministry of traveling throughout the Roman Empire to preach the gospel to Jews, like the apostle Peter; or to preach the gospel to Gentiles like the apostle Paul. James was called by the Lord not to a traveling ministry of church planting, but instead to stay put in Jerusalem and lead the church there. James was called,

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To be a promoter of Jesus' message [to his own neighbors, friends, and family].

Now, James was wildly successful in his calling. God blessed James' home-based ministry. Here is what we read in Acts 21.17-20,

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*Ac 21:17 When we arrived at Jerusalem, the believers received us warmly.*

*<sup>18</sup> The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. <sup>19</sup> Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. <sup>20</sup> When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: “You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law.*

You know, when it says that many thousands have believed, it literally reads that many tens of thousands have believed. And some church historians have suggested that a minimum of some 50,000 Jews in ancient Palestine turned to Jesus for salvation through James and the Jerusalem church. James was a proclaimer of the message of the gospel to people in his own circle, to his Jewish friends, family, and neighbors.

You know, when I think of the call on the life of James, I think of Jesus’ words to a man he delivered from multiple demons. Here is what we read in Mark 5.18-20,

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*Mk 5:18 As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him. <sup>19</sup> Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”*

*<sup>20</sup> So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.*

#### HIGHLIGHT SLIDE

*Mk 5:19 Jesus did not let him, but said, “Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.”*

I think Jesus’ words in Mark 5:19 and the kind of call that James had is really the model for the vast majority of us as Christians. Go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has mercy on you. The Holy Spirit would say to some of you: Go home to your own family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you. Go to your own friends at work...Go to your fellow students...Go to your roommates...Go to your immediate circle...Go to your barber and hairdresser...and the person who works on your car...your boss and your secretary and tell them how much the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.

Do you have a father or mother, a sister or brother, a son or daughter, an aunt or uncle, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, who has not yet found salvation through Christ? Why not be James to them? Pray for them and as God gives you opportunity, share the message of Jesus with them.

Friends, most of us are not called to be foreign missionaries. Most of us are not called to be Peters or Pauls. Most of us are called to share the gospel with our own family members, with our own coworkers, neighbors, clients, and those who serve us. Listen to the words of Mother Teresa:

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Peace and war start within one's own home. If we really want peace for the world, let us start by loving one another within our families.

Sometimes it is hard for us to smile at one another. It is often difficult for the husband to smile at his wife, or for the wife to smile at her husband.

In order for love to be genuine, it has to be above all a love for our neighbor. We must love those who are nearest to us, in our own family. From there, love spreads toward whoever may need us.

It is easy to love those who live far away. It is not always easy to love those who live right next to us. It is easier to offer a dish of rice to meet the hunger of a needy person than to comfort the loneliness and anguish of someone in our own home who does not feel loved.

I want you to go and find the poor in your homes. Above all, your love has to start there. I want you to be the good news to those around you. I want you to be concerned about your next-door neighbor. Do you know who your neighbor is?

If you are part of this church, we have a yard sign for you to put in your yard communicating to anyone who walks by your home or drives by in a car about our Christmas Eve services. But in your bulletins there are also some fold-over cards that you can put in our purse or wallet. Why not make a commitment that you are going to hand out those cards and personally invite a friend, family member, a client, or coworker, or fellow student to our Christmas Eve service? Follow the model of James and bring the gospel to your nearest circle.

We see James as a member of the redefined family of Jesus. He is a believer in Jesus' person. James is a promoter of Jesus' message. And finally:

SLIDE

James is a peacemaker among Jesus' people.

Acts 15 tells us about one of the two or three most important meetings that have ever taken place in the 2000 years of Christian history. A controversy broke out in the early church about the conditions upon which Gentiles would be admitted to the church as full members of the people of God. On the one hand, you had Jewish believers in Jesus that were from the party of the Pharisees who said the only way that Gentiles could be full members of the church would be to become

circumcised. On the other end of the spectrum, you had the apostle Paul saying, listen, there should be no conditions for Gentile admission to the church other than faith in Jesus Christ alone.

So in the early days of the Christian church there was a threat that the church would be split right down the middle. Christian Pharisees said, "Gentiles, you need to be circumcised." People aligned with the apostle Paul said, "No, the only thing you need to do is have faith in Jesus."

And then there is James, the leader of the Jerusalem church. Now everything in James' background would have inclined him to go along with the Christian Pharisees position. James was raised in a religious Jewish family. Joseph and Mary named their sons after the great Jewish patriarchs and after the leaders of the Maccabean revolt, those wonderful Jewish heroes whose exploits are still celebrated by Jews in the December holiday of Hanukkah. The family of Joseph and Mary was a devotedly Jewish family. They went to synagogue every week. We see Jesus at the Temple for his bar mitzvah.

Even at the end of James' life, while James was being martyred at the Jewish Temple, church history tells us that his martyrdom was protested by Torah observant Jews. Even though James was a follower of Jesus, Jewish non-followers of Jesus objected to his execution because they said James was a Torah-observant Jew. In other words, his whole life he strictly kept the Jewish commandments even while he was a follower of Jesus.

Everything in James' family background and history and current practice should have allied him with the group of Christian Pharisees who said that Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be full members of the church. But where does James end up? In a remarkable act of spiritual maturity and courage, James is able to transcend his prejudices. He is able to rise above his background. He rejects the position of his natural allies. We read these words in Acts 15.19,

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*Ac 15:19 "It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God."*

No circumcision, no obstacles. Let's not make it difficult for Gentiles who are turning to God. Let's not throw any stumbling blocks in their way. You know, it takes a remarkable person to be able to get beyond their own perspectives and their own natural inclinations. It takes a remarkable person to not just be persuaded by their friends and family circle, but to be able to rise above all of that and to be fair minded in order to make peace.

It would take an extraordinary amount of emotional and spiritual maturity for an Israeli today to listen to the legitimate claims of a Palestinian and to advocate for Palestinians. It would take remarkable spiritual and emotional maturity for a

Palestinian to hear the pain suffered by an Israeli and to advocate for the state of Israel.

Eleven years ago there was one of the most remarkable events ever to happen in the world of sports. The Rugby World Cup Tournament was held in South Africa. And the sport of rugby was a particularly sore point in a country that had been wracked by racial division through apartheid. You see, the South African national team was almost entirely white. And virtually everyone who supported the team in South Africa was white. Many blacks in South Africa in 1995 saw rugby as one of those hold-over reminders of white domination and white rule. They deeply resented this tournament being played in their country.

But there is a man in South Africa who has the spiritual and emotional maturity to rise above his background, to rise above his prejudices, to rise above his culture. His name is Nelson Mandela. And in one of the most remarkable events in all of sports history, when the South African team won the rugby tournament, none other than Nelson Mandela walked out to the center of the stadium. He put on the jersey of the South African national team – the jersey that represented in many people's minds white rule. He came out with a springbok rugby shirt and a baseball cap. He presented the World Cup trophy to the South African rugby captain to the delight of the capacity crowd in Johannesburg. The white crowd leapt to their feet and applauded until they were exhausted from cheering and applauding.

You know, greatness is not measured by whether you can passionately advocate for your own position. Spiritual greatness is measured by whether you can passionately advocate for the position of someone your whole background would cause you to naturally disagree with – someone who is of a different political persuasion than you; someone who is of a different race than you; someone who is of a different religion than you. Have you ever prayed and said, "God, help me to be able to go beyond my prejudices, my preferences, my background. Help me to rise above all of this and be absolutely fair minded and committed to your perspectives and your will."

James was a man with that kind of spiritual greatness. He was a peacemaker. He was a proclaimer of the gospel. He was a model for us of the way the Christian life is to be lived. Let's pray.

*I. A Member Of Jesus' Family (Mk 6.3; Gal. 1.19)*

*II. A Member Of Jesus' Redefined Family (Mk. 3.31-35)*

*III. A Believer In Jesus' Person (1 Cor. 15.7)*

*IV. A Promoter Of Jesus' Message  
(Acts 21.18-20; Mk. 5.18-20)*

*V. A Peacemaker Among Jesus' People  
(Acts 15.12-20)*