

## **The Half Hour That Changes the World**

**James**

**Book 59**

### **Basic Questions behind the book:**

*How do I know whether my faith is authentic? And what about yours? Is it the real thing also?*

### **Summary of book:**

The Epistle of James is one of the 'Catholic' Epistles, so-called because there is no particular group or individual in mind as recipient. *Catholic* here is being used in the sense of universal, that is, it is for all Christians everywhere. It is very *Hebrew* in thought and style. It is robust, hard-hitting, no-nonsense practical stuff with a number of echoes of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5. It is very practical. Just look at the list below of topics that are covered:

- How to deal with temptation, trials and testing.
- Social Ethics and Equality: Taking pride in your low position.
- Putting Faith in practice: Being doers of the Word not just hearers
- Being careful with our speech: Taming the tongue
- Being right with God and one another: Confession
- Pointing to the ongoing activity of God in the Faith Community: Healing

It is a real, first century style, how-to-guide, to living out your Christian life. Read it and enjoy it.

### **Vital Statistics:**

Purpose: To expose hypocritical practices and to teach right Christian behaviour (*orthopraxis*)

Author: James, possibly the biological brother of Jesus, who came to faith reputedly after the resurrection; a key leader in the early Jerusalem Church. He appears in Acts and is mentioned in a number of other places through the New Testament. Note, that this isn't John's brother / Zebedee's son.

Recipients: First Century Jewish Christians residing in Gentile communities outside Palestine, and all Christians everywhere.

Dating: It is suggested that James was written probably around AD49 just prior to the Council of Jerusalem in AD50 and recorded for us in Acts 13.

Setting: This letter expresses James' concern for persecuted Christians who were once part of the Jerusalem Church, who have been dispersed elsewhere, and who need guidance in following Christ in a hostile world.

### **Other Reflections:**

I offer two reflections on James for your consideration. Firstly, I want to introduce you to the comment of the great Reformer Martin Luther, who called the epistle, 'the epistle of straw'. Indeed, as far as Luther was concerned it would have been best left out of the New Testament! Why such a strange and strong reaction? The answer lies in the reality that for Luther the core doctrine of Christianity, which he had awakened to and brought back to the Church's consciousness, was the doctrine of justification by grace through faith. For Luther this central doctrine was absent in this epistle. Upon further reflection, dare we suggest that Luther was wrong? That while the doctrine is never explicitly spelt out, the call to action on the basis of faith and the whole depiction of what the Church and the disciple should be like, clearly have this doctrine underpinning them. Interestingly, there is a strong argument that would suggest that the book of James lay close to the form of the faith espoused by John Wesley.

The second thought follows on from this and it is the matter of authenticity – walking the walk and talking the talk; being consistent; counting the cost; being genuine. In a world that believes we and our message are inconsistent and irrelevant, don't we need the message of this book once again in the church to be proclaimed loud and clear.

**Key Verses:** *“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. But someone will say, ‘you have faith, I have deeds’. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do!” (2:17, 18)*