

Bible-Reading Coach Podcast Transcript

Week 51: James, 1&2 Peter, 1-3 John, Jude, *Faith and Works*

Welcome to Week 51 of the Bible reading coach podcast. My name is Karl Vaters and I'm here to help you read through the entire Bible in 52 weeks.

This week, we are going to set a record just in time before the end of all of this, we're gonna set a record for reading more books than any other week that we've read this year. We're going to spend the bulk of our time in the pretty short books of James, First Peter, and First John. And then we'll read through the super small books of Second Peter, Second, and Third, John and Jude. So for the first time since Acts, we're going to be reading books that we know were written by somebody other than the apostle Paul, Hebrews last week, may have been the apostle Paul, these ones for sure were not written by the Apostle Paul. These books were written by the writers whose books they're titled after so First, Second and Third John were written by John, First and Second Peter, by Peter, and so on. So let's take a look at them one at a time as we'll be going through them this week, shall we?

First of all, the book of James James was written by James and who was James? Well, James was actually the half brother of Jesus. Yes, Jesus had half siblings, who were the Children of Mary and Joseph after Mary Joseph got married after Jesus had been born. They are only half siblings, because of course, Joseph was not Jesus' biological father. So there were only half siblings. We know this, because they are mentioned in Mark six. And in Matthew 13. The names of His half brothers were James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. Plus he had sisters who were not named in either of those passages. James is also mentioned in First Corinthians 15, because Jesus appeared to him after the resurrection. And James became a pillar of the early church, one of the primary church leaders in Jerusalem. We read a little bit about his role there in Acts 12, Acts 15, and Acts 21. So this James is that James.

All right, let's walk through his book. It's such an important book, one of those really pivotal books in the entire Bible that helps us to understand the challenge of living by faith, but how it works actually intermingles with the idea of being saved and of living by faith, so James, first of all, in fact, James, as we read through, what we're going to see is, is basically the subjects are divided into half chapters, okay? It's got a total of five chapters, but it really could have 10, super short, short chapters, because it's pretty much half a chapter on one subject, another half a chapter on another subject, there's a lot that he covers. So let's go through it basically, half chapter, by half chapters, we walk through this.

First of all entry, after introducing himself as a servant of Jesus, not the half brother of Jesus, because his true identity was as a disciple of Christ and not simply as a biological half brother of Jesus, he launches then right off the top into a celebration of the joy that we have in Jesus, including the joy that we have in suffering for Jesus. Again, we've seen it already, the extraordinary attitude that the early Christians had, that they got more frustrated over disunity in the church, they got more frustrated over false teachers in the church than they got about the suffering that came at them from outside the church. And that needs to be our approach as well.

So that's the first half of the first chapter, the second half of the first chapter, he launches into what's really the essence of the book, that is that faith without works is dead. We don't get that exact verse in this passage, we'll get to it soon. But basically, what he says in the last half of

the first chapter is, if you're only hearing about Jesus, if you're only hearing the gospel, and you're not doing anything about it, you're deceiving yourselves. This is a really important message for Christians for the last 2000 years. If you go to church, and you go to church every single Sunday, and then you go home, and you do nothing about it. James actually says you're living in self deception. You're deceiving yourself, and the truth is not in you, as James actually says. So if we're going to hear it, we have a responsibility to do something about it.

Then we go to James chapter two, the first half of James, chapter two, tells us that we should not be favoring rich people over poor people, when we come to the church. This must have been a problem then, you don't raise that as an issue if it hasn't been a problem. And of course, it's always been a problem in the church. It's the human condition, that we want to favor that, well, we don't want to but we tend to favor wealthy people over poor people. But it's a huge theme of the Bible that the poor matter to Jesus that the poor matter to God. It's not better to be poor than to be rich. But Jesus has a special place in his heart for the plight of the poor.

The second half of the second chapter then gets back to this primary theme, that faith without works is that, in fact, we get that exact phrasing in James chapter two, verse 26. He's not saying that works, or deeds are the things that we do save us. He's saying that these works and deeds and the way that it works out in our life is the evidence of a transformed Christ-like heart.

We then moved to chapter three, the first half of that chapter is about taming the tongue. There's so much practical advice. And James is one of the reasons it's really one of my favorite books to read and to study. The practical advice is just really, really great. And what he tells us basically, is that one of the primary ways that we as Christians failed to act like Jesus is in what we say, or today what we type online, right? This is one of the strongest statements in the Bible about the power of negative words and how it is that our words need to match our behavior. Quite often, we get it the other way around, you know that you need to, you need to talk the talk, if you need to walk the walk, we usually look at it, and we say, well, you know, you need to, you need to do what you're saying. And we also need to say what we're doing, right? Accurate speech is important in Scripture, what we do and say should match each other. And if we are, if we are behaving ourselves by going to church, and we think we're doing all the right things, but then we're gossiping in the church lobby the Bible, the Bible says here in James very clearly, that we're we're in a we're in a bad and dangerous place, we've got to tame our tongue, we've got to be better at what we say and the way we use our words, we should be blessing people and not cursing them.

And the last half of chapter three talks about wisdom and how truly wise people have an integrated life, that their words, their thoughts, and their deeds all match up. Beginning of James chapter four, he talks about how important it is to submit to God. He basically says throughout the entire chapter four, he asked the question, Why aren't all our prayers answered? And the first half of the chapter basically says, well, we don't get all our prayers answered. First of all, because we're half the time we don't ask. God's not going to answer prayers that we haven't asked. Secondly, when we do ask, we ask selfishly, we don't ask according to God's will we ask according to our own will. And so he ends that chapter by talking about the importance of submitting to God and to His will. You want your prayers answered, ask prayers that you know have been pre approved, that is that go along with God's will. God will never defy his own will no

matter how hard we pray, no matter how sincerely we want it. Our prayers have to be in line with God's will. And when they are, it's amazing the things that God can and will do through us.

And then he concludes the book in chapter five, by at the beginning of it talking about the themes of the wealthy and the poor, again, as we've talked about before, and then he ends with this glorious passage, about the prayer of faith. There's this amazing passage about if you're sick, and if you're hurting, and if you've sinned, what do you do? call for the elders of the church, have them anoint you with oil. And the prayer of faith will save the sick, how important it is for us to pray for one another. And that's where James and we then moved to the books of First and Second Peter, Peter, the author of these two books was the disciple. It's the Peter you think it is, it's the disciple that we've already read so much about in the gospels, and in the book of Acts, and even a few comments that were mentioned in some of Paul's writings.

A quick note here, James, which we just talked about, first, and Second Peter, which we're about to talk about, and then first and second, third, and John and Jude, which will be coming later, are all called General Epistles. And here's why. Take a look at how First Peter begins. First Peter, chapter one, verse one begins this way, Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, that first of all, is how we know who wrote it to God's elect exiles scattered throughout the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.

Alright, so if you've read through with the the other books before this, the letters, especially of Paul, Paul writes, Romans to the Romans Ephesians, two Ephesus, right there, they're written to specific people or specific places, the general epistles are written to the church in general to the exiles who are scattered, okay. Now, this is one of the reasons why these general epistles, quite frankly, are taught so much because they were written for Christians in general, kind of, they apply to us in general more directly. It's easier to read them and go, Oh, that applies here. Right, we talked about it earlier when we were reading First Corinthians, for instance. I mentioned that Paul wrote at least four letters to the Corinthians and the Corinthians wrote letters back to Paul with questions. And at times, as we read through First and Second Corinthians, We don't know what question he's answering.

So we have to be a little more careful in our interpretation, always have to be careful and interpret, but it's a bigger challenge in books like First and Second Corinthians, the general All epistles are a little less challenging because they're just written to all Christians at all times. Okay? So they, because of this, these books don't have the circumstantial issues going on around them that the books like Corinthians and Ephesians have that we need to figure out, and so that we can approach them a little more directly and a little easier to approach them. Peter says that he wrote this book First Peter from Babylon. He says that in chapter five, verse 13, that is almost certainly a reference to Rome, that Rome symbolically was the Babylon of their day.

This also matches what he says, he's writing into exiles, who are the exiles, or these are people who were who had to leave their homes, who had to leave their hometowns, and sometimes their home regions because of Roman persecution. So he's writing to people who have been persecuted by Rome. And he's writing it from Rome. So to them Rome was their current day Babylon. So that's almost certainly what was happening there. Let's take a look through the book chapter by chapter real quick, then, shall we?

First Peter, chapter one, he starts with the balance we've seen before with the writings of Paul, balancing the glory of Jesus, and the need to respond to being a holy people, that God

has saved us by grace, but we also need to be a holy people. And he talks about that balance again. And again, a word on holiness, we talked about it a lot. The word holy means separate. In the Old Testament, holiness meant we as God's people, the ethnic Jewish Hebrew race, physically separated themselves into a separate land from the other people. And there was a lot of physicality that went into their holiness and into their separation. In the New Testament, holiness changes on that one aspect, holy still means to live morally, to live righteously, to live biblically. But now it no longer means to live in isolation geographically from other people.

In fact, we are called to go into those places, just like Jesus walked through Samaria on purpose, which shocked them. Why? Because holiness for them meant you don't go near Samaria. Holiness to Jesus meant I'm going to take this light and shine it in a dark place. So holiness in the Old Testament was really a defensive position. holiness in the New Testament is an offensive position. It gives us strength for the mission that Jesus has sent us on. Okay.

Then we'll go to First Peter chapter two, where he uses two different types of metaphors. He, the living stone and the chosen people. Both of these are metaphors from the Old Testament. First of all, he says, Christ is the living stone we've been looking for. And what does that mean, stones were used to build the temple. There was a chief cornerstone, that was the anchor point for every builder who came along after that Christ has already been called the chief cornerstone. And he's not just a cornerstone, he has a living stone, he's not, he's not made of rock, he has an actual living stone that is being made to build a living temple, of which we also are stones, as the Apostle Paul has already told us, okay, and then he tells us because of that we are a chosen people, including those of us who are Gentiles, who have come to know Christ.

And then he goes to Chapter Three of First Peter, where he talks about husbands and wives. This is another passage like the one we read, recently in Ephesians. That is, it can be challenging for us to understand. If here's the difference between here in Ephesians, in Ephesians, the first verse of the passage, even though it's in a different chapter, starts with that we should submit to each other. And then it talks about husbands and wives, parents and children's Slaves and free people, about how that how that mutual submission happens under Christ. The goal is always that mutual submission. Here in this passage in First Peter three, the passage about husbands and wives, and mute and submission ends with a call to mutual submission.

And First Peter one eight, which says, Finally, after he talks about husbands and wives, and how we relate to each other, "Finally, all of you be like minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble." So he's working through now, as Christians, how do we live as brothers and sisters in Christ, given a stratified society that they lived in the challenging passage for us in the 21st century, but we've already talked about some of that when we talked about Ephesians. So you can go back and listen to that again, if you'd like. Alright, then we got to First Peter four through five is where we finish this particular book up, where he talks about faithfulness through suffering.

He ends the book by calling us back to the importance of living for Jesus, even if we have to suffer for a living for Jesus, which Jesus promised a whole lot of his followers would go through suffering because of him. He also gives us instructions about how the young and old in the church should treat each other, how we should care for each other. And I want you to note that everything, including these basic manners of how old and young people treat each other, all of them are really addressed by the gospel.

Then we'll go to Second Peter, where the theme of Second Peter is really about dealing with false teachers in the church. First, the primary difference between first and second Peter is this. In First Peter, it was all about dealing with the challenges from outside the church, the persecution that was coming against us and how to behave as God's people among persecution coming at us from the outside. Second, Peter is about facing down the troubles within the church, the false teachers within the church. And as with any family, or nation, or people, the church's most troublesome times are not what comes at us from the outside, the church is always at its worst when we are at each other from the inside. We are typically at our best, when we face opposition from the outside, the biggest problems of the church is not persecution, the biggest problems of the church are bad theology that is accepting false teachers, and being divisive, not being united as God's people. Those are the things we need to avoid. And that's what Second Peter really teaches us about.

And then we'll get to the really short books of first, second and third John. Well, second John, especially short, first, John, not overly short, given the books that we're in right now, John was who Well, John was the John you think it is, is he's the disciple who also wrote the Gospel of John, and who wrote the book we'll talk about next week in our last week together, the book of Revelation as well. First John has been called the Epistle of love, love, loved, loving, loves, all the variations of the word love are repeated at least 33 times in this short book, that's what it's really all about. One of the primary reasons John wrote this book was to refute a heresy that is a false teaching, called Gnosticism.

Gnosticism was an early heresy or an early false teaching in the church, that basically taught that the body is sinful, and the spirit is righteous, which we can hear that go, I guess that kind of makes sense. And that's why it's so easy to be fooled by it, because it sounds right off the top. But it's not. If you believe that the body is sinful, and the spirit is righteous, it can lead to all kinds of problems, here are just four of the problems that can lead to first of all, if the body is sinful, and only the spirit is righteous, then Jesus could not have been God because Jesus had a body. So right there, the incarnation, the fact that Jesus, that God came to earth, bodily, in bodily form in Jesus, you can't be a gnostic, and believe that, and everything about our salvation is gone, then. So that's the biggest one.

Secondly, if we believe that the body is sinful, and the spirit is good, then Gnostics there come to one of two sides. One side is this, that what we do in our bodies, doesn't matter if it's sinful, anyway, doesn't care. So there was a group of Gnostics who were engaged in sexual sin and drunkenness, and all kinds of things, because it's just in the body doesn't matter, I'm living right in my spirit. The other side of that was if the body is sinful, therefore it must be punished. So you actually had actually two groups of Gnostics, who had a group of Gnostics that that beat their body and, and torture their own body and hurt their own body to punish it for being sinful. And another group of Gnostics who said "Partay!", because we get whatever we do in the body doesn't matter. It's sinful anyway, it's going to be corrupt, it's going to be gone anyway. And guess which of those groups is more popular? Right? Alright.

And then the fourth, the fourth and potential damage that narcissism cause or not potential, the fourth damage that narcissism caused is, if the body is sinful, then if somebody else is suffering in their body, like to poverty, or self starvation, or through illness, then either there's their sickness, their pain doesn't matter, because it's just in a sinful body, or their pain and their illness is deserved, because they must have done something sinful in that horrible

body. And so they didn't treat poor people well, or sick people well, or starving people by giving them food, it didn't matter, because it was only about the body. All kinds of bad things happen.

If you take the idea of Gnosticism, that the body is sinful, and the spirit is good. Also, if the Spirit is always good, then even negative spirits are good. As long as it's spiritual, it's good, right? There's a subtle Gnosticism today when people talk about you know, I'm, I'm not religious, I'm just spiritual. What kind of spirit? Well, doesn't matter as long as you are spiritual? Yeah it does. There's good spirits and bad spirits. And Gnosticism says, No, all spirit is good. So there's all kinds of dangers on the spirit side as well.

So first, second, and third John, deal with that to a large degree. That was the big false teaching that was going on that John refutes in his writing, and then we'll finish out the week with the tiny little book of Jude. So who was Jude? Well, Jude was another half brother of Jesus sometime is referred to as Judas. Yeah, I know. There are at least three, Judas is in the Bible, only one who's really famous for the horrible things you did in betraying Jesus, of course. But he also had a half brother named Judas, or, as the title of the book says, also called Jude, he was also a leader in the Jerusalem church. When you read it, you're going to notice a lot of similarities between Second Peter and Jude. They are so similar that most biblical scholars think that one probably knew of the other; we don't know which one was written first. But whichever of the two Jude or second,

Peter was written second, the author of that one no question knew about the other book, and they would have known each other because both Peter and Jude were leaders together in the Jerusalem church, they were literally in the same room an awful lot of the time. So they drew from each other's teachings, they learned from each other, whoever wrote their book, second, probably due from the other book. It's a very, very short one chapter book, not quite as short as Third John, but one of the shortest books in the Bible. And it too, is mostly about dealing with false teachers.

All right. Those are the books we're going to be reading this week, a lot of really great stuff, take a note of a couple of things. First of all, note how much of our lives are affected by the Jesus Gospel, all of our life is affected by Jesus Gospel, but also notice how change how everything has to change. Because of that everything from the way older and younger people treat each other to men and women to husbands and wives, to Gentiles, and Jews, to the poor, and the rich. I mean, everything about their society was completely up-ended by this amazing new gospel that says, We need to treat each other better. We're all made in the image of God. Every single basic, fundamental, foundational teaching of Scripture changes our behavior in positive ways.

And also take a note as you go through it, that the greatest danger to the church is never the assault from the outside. There. There's a whole lot of real concern today and some of it very legitimate, about the assaults that are coming in the church from the outside. But here's the thing. I'm really not as worried about that as I am about disunity within the church. Why? Because the Bible over and over and over again says that its false teaching in the church is a bigger problem than an assault upon the church from the outside. Disunity within the church is a bigger problem for the church than the assault from the outside.

So we need to be people of God, we need to know Scripture, we need to understand it. So we won't be led astray by false teachers. And around that truth, we need to be completely united as people of God. Let's make the primary things, the primary things and let's not fight

about the secondary things. Let's stay together under Christ together as God's people. And as you read this week, take note of those things, because they will affect not just what you believe, but the way we behave, which as we'll see this week. The God the letter of James tells us how we behave matters an awful lot. All right, have a great week of reading. We'll see you next week for the last week in the entire series. Thanks.

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