

James the Just – Part 4

Good Works

(Sermon Notes)

By Warren Zehrung – 12/01/2012

There are many stories in the Bible that have gone untold.

One such story has to do with our Lord's little brother – James.

The Book of James is our text for today.

What did James see, what did he know, what did he understand about his big brother, Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that he was an unbeliever – that is – he was “unconverted: during the time of Jesus public ministry.

We know that later on, James became a powerful Church leader – evidence of this is James' role as Chairman of the Ministerial Conference at Jerusalem – **Acts 15**.

John 7:

5 For neither did his brothers believe in Him [Jesus Christ].

Jesus, the eldest of the **five** brothers had become the head of Joseph's household when Joseph died.

Joseph died between the time Jesus was 12 years old – and the time He began His public ministry at 30 years of age.

Matthew 13:

55 Is not this the carpenter's [Joseph] son [Jesus]? is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas?

56 And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?

It was Jesus responsibility to take care of Mary His mother – but he did not leave her welfare in the hands of any of his brothers – but committed her safe keeping to the beloved apostle John.

We see that in:

John 19:

26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother [standing by the cross], and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

27 Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

That was a legal transference of authority to John – but not to James.

Apparently, James was not mature enough – or James could have been away at school.

So called experts say that James could not have written the book by his name because someone raised in Palestine could not have penned the superb Greek utilized in the book.

There are 70 Greek words in James that are **nowhere** found in the rest of the New Testament!

Perhaps Joseph of Arimathaea saw James aptitude and propensity for learning and funded James travels and scholarship – we just don't know the story.

One thing we do know is that James would have seen and shared a lot of childhood **memories** with his brother, Jesus.

Undoubtedly, James would have been aware of the self-righteous demeanor of the Pharisees of the day.

The scribes and the Pharisees were notorious for pretending to be righteous – but inwardly they were evil men.

They sought to destroy Christ throughout His entire public ministry because their hearts were evil.

Matthew 5

SPS: In today's sermon we are going to compare the two concepts of "**substitute religion**" and "True Christianity."

True Christianity is associated and accompanied by **Good Works**.

These concepts need to be defined.

Matthew 5:

16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see **your good works**, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

James 1

****"Good works"** means obedience to God's way, God's Law, God's purpose – it means living **righteously**.

Let's talk about "Good Works" for a moment.

What does James mean by "good works?"

James used the same Greek word for “Works” that Paul used, “*ergon*,” which means to work, toil, do labor – as in, “*Be ye **doers of the word.***”

James 1:

22 But be ye **doers of the word**, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

James had a converted mind and heart and was witness to the fact that too many Christians had a “row, row, row, your boat gently down the stream – approach to Christianity – and they were about to go over Niagara Falls...

When in fact Christianity is a fight your way up river **against the current** – kind of religion.

James passionately presents 60 directives for those who would live lives of True Christianity. (Study the entire book.)

How are we — **doers of the word – it is most important to know?**

When James says “**works**” – he is speaking of **Godly action**.

“Works” are any **deeds – doing -- actions** that are in accordance with God’s purposes.

Like: Serving others...

Like: Laying down your life to help others into the Kingdom of God.

Like: Keeping the Ten Commandments

** Like: Making personal sacrifices for the sake of others.

When was the last time, brethren, you put your life, or your fortune, or **your job**, on the line to truly help some into the Kingdom of God?

When was the last time you put your **life on the line** for the Truth – or to help someone reconcile, as they must?

When was the last time you put your life on line to turn someone **back to God?**

***“**Works**” are **Doing things** according to the **Word** of God.

Our “Works” are nothing less than the sum total of how we live our lives – for good or for bad.

Ask yourself, “Have I left a legacy of good works?”

For us, Brethren, **living righteously** is what **True Christianity** is all about.

But, Brethren, what we find all too often, is that people today – just like the Scribes and Pharisees of Jesus day – have a **substitute righteousness in their practice of Christianity.

Matthew 23

The way the Scribes and the Pharisees lived was not according to **Godly righteousness** but it was a **substitute righteousness**.

This “substitute religion**” is what James warns the Church of in his epistle.

Brethren, I want you to key in on this phrase - “**substitute religion**”

Understand that “**substitute religion**” is NOT a viable alternative to True Christianity.

“**Substitute religion**” is False religion – and that is what the Book of James compares and contrasts.

It is a salvational matter that we unmistakably understand the difference between “**Substitute religion**” and **True Christianity**.

Matthew 23:

- 1 Then spoke Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples,
- 2 Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat:
- 3 All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye **after their works**: for they say, and do not.
- 4 For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.
- 5 But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,
- 6 And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,
- 7 And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi.

People would fall all over themselves trying to impress the Rabbi.

That is **false religion**.

Notice how Jesus changes gears here:

In **Matthew 23:11** we will see where Jesus speaks of True Christianity.

- 11 But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant.
- 12 And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.
- 13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.

How did they shut up the kingdom of heaven?

Those people who followed the wrong example of the Pharisees would be kept out of the Kingdom as well.

Matthew 23:

14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the **greater damnation**.

God is serious about **True Christianity**.

John 8:

39 The [Pharisees] answered and said unto Him, Abraham is our father. Jesus saith unto them, If ye were Abraham's children, ye would do the **works** of Abraham.

James 2:

21 Was not Abraham our father **justified by works** [obedience to God], when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar?

YES! Abraham was **justified by obedience** to God – his works.

Genesis 26:

5 Because that Abraham **obeyed My voice**, and kept my charge, **My commandments**, my statutes, and **My laws**.

How well, brethren, do we know the principles Jesus taught? Do we recognize "Substitute Religion" when we encounter it?

All too many have accepted a substitute "Christianity."

Spiritually, brethren, the Church is not prepared for the return of Christ.

We mistakenly seek recognition.

We look for miracles.

We respect persons.

We want our **corporate church** to be bigger and better than all the rest.

We have all too many substitutes for "Christianity."

A Christian is not one who knows about the place of safety.

A Christian is not one who tithes and goes to Church on Saturday - some Jewish and Protestant folks do that.

A Christian is one who knows what Jesus taught and lives it to the full.

Jesus tells us how to be Christians and end up in the Kingdom of God.

Today, there are many substitutes masquerading as God's True Church.

It behooves us to be extremely careful when we are looking for the Church Jesus established.

The "Church" is not a building... It is not an organization... The Church is God's **PEOPLE** – nothing else!

Too many of our brethren do not understand the concept of Church."

Some believe that if they get the prophecy right they will have it made.

Some believe it is all about food, or how a person dresses.

Romans 14:

17 The Kingdom of God is **not** meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Recently we had the wonderful opportunity of attending a meeting of church brethren from **ten different** scattered groups.

In addition to the usual sermons, songs and prayers, we had an open give and take **inter-active** question and answer session.

We had come together to explore the concept of "**Unity of the Spirit**" among church brethren.

The ladies especially enjoyed being a part of the discussions and being able to voice their comments and concerns.

There were brethren in attendance who fully understood that **true Christianity** involves caring, serving, good works and laying down their lives for others.

There is a problem in God's Church in that not everyone comprehends the necessity for Christians to be living sacrifices and doers of **good works**.

That is why God has preserved the Book of James with all this information for True Christians.

Ours is not a "feel good" church.

There are some brethren who think that being in the right **church group** insures their good standing with God.

We should understand that we **cannot** ride on someone's **coat-tails** into the Kingdom of God.

Ezekiel 14:

14 Though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, they should **deliver but their own souls** by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 14:

20 Though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, saith the Lord GOD, they shall deliver neither son nor daughter; they shall but deliver their own souls **by their righteousness**.

Those who think that - have forgotten the admonition that requires that we go on to perfection.

During the bewilderment of the apostasy some brethren were maliciously cast aside.

They were disfellowshipped, maligned, marked – for holding true to God's Word.

For some, the scars of that abuse remain.

Ezekiel 34

We live in an era in which the brethren must be allowed to heal – it is only proper and right.

Brethren are reluctant to trust again after being hurt repeatedly by a harsh ministry.

****There are brethren who continue seeking for others with whom to fellowship who are **living** according to God's truth.**

That is who we are searching for.

It is God's Will that all the brethren, including those that were **driven away**, be fed and nourished – that's a **good work**.

*Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds; "The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, **neither have ye brought again that which was driven away**, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them."* (Ezekiel 34:4)

How many of us were driven away by harsh ministers who remain in the larger groups?

How many of us were **disfellowshipped** and **marked** for holding fast to God's Word?

We had our names read from the pulpit so that the brethren would not speak to us!

Interestingly, at that mini-symposium that we attended, there were **no** representatives of the larger and better known corporate organizations.

Those corporate organizations which declare themselves to be the biggest, or the best...

There were **no** representatives from those who claim to have the privilege of leadership, or claim to be doing the greatest work...

There were **no** representatives from the corporate group which claims to be the spear point of the work of God.

They did not participate in the symposium.

Symposium is a good word. In the Greek it means, "To drink together." And that is what we were doing there – drinking in of God's Word, and seeking His Will in our efforts at being **one in Spirit**.

Jesus prayed **FIVE** times *that we may be one*.

Here's one of those places:

John 17:

11 And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, **that they may be one**, as we are.

The coming together of these dispersed brethren was more of a grassroots movement of shattered members than it was a group seeking fame or recognition.

I want you to picture this brethren:

On any given Sabbath there are **two** parallel universes – side by side – attending services.

One, wants to be biggest and best with their name in lights – and recognized and looked up to – and they brag about it!

The other, humbly seeking God's Will.

What does God say our attitude must be?

Matthew 6:

1 Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, **to be seen of them**: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Luke 18:

- 10** Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican.
- 11** The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that **I am not as other men are**, [I'm better than others] extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.
- 12** I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.
- 13** And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, **God be merciful to me a sinner.**
- 14** I tell you, this man went down to his house **justified**. [in God's sight.]

The purpose of our coming together with all those scattered brethren was not to build another competing corporate organization.

There was a legitimate desire of the brethren to fellowship with those of like mind and Spirit.

Jesus Christ does not approve of division within His Body. When He said, "*This is my Body,*" and, "*I will build my Church,*" He had **only one Church** in mind (**Matthew 16:18**).

Jesus Christ is not satisfied as long as the brethren are split by man-made boundaries of separation.

Division breeds competition – and competition yields bad fruit.

The danger to the membership arises from a feeling of self-assurance that they are in the "right" church group.

When a person begins to believe, "I'm in the "**right**" corporate church group," That implies that others are in the "**wrong**" group.

The problem with that is; Christianity **does not** work that way.

The epistle of James addressed the same problem in his day when the brethren fell into a **substitute religion** and thought they were doing just fine – when they were **not** doing the **works** of God at all.

James discusses at least a dozen examples of **wrong** Christian practices within the Church of God.

James corrected the **false religion** that was extant in the Congregations of his day. And God preserved it for us!

James 1

God wants us to understand about “**Substitute Religion.**”

Those brethren were smug in their faith – and they really felt that they were better than other people.

Their inward superiority colored everything they said and did.

Let's be careful not to have a **Substitute Religion** – which is a False Faith.

Some of our brethren today have gotten so “religious” that they are no longer with God.

Sure, they warmed a bench every Saturday and dutifully brought a casserole to every pot-luck.

They didn't eat pork chops or easter bunnies.

They didn't have statues or christmas trees.

They didn't eat shrimp or catfish...

They didn't..., didn't..., and didn't..., and thought they were good Christians. And they **didn't practice Pure Religion**, or do **Good Works**.

James 1:

27 "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Deuteronomy 10

Taking care of the needy was **not** a New Testament concept to James.

But actually **doing it** – that was being neglected by the church.

Notice what God said in:

Deuteronomy 10:

18 He doth execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.

19 Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Getting together with brethren has a purpose!

Everyone knows that Paul said *not to forsake the **assembling of yourselves together***, but how many remember **why**?

Is it to be seen by the minister?

Is it to get your time-card punched like a union worker?

Is it merely a social gathering?

Paul tells us what the purpose of assembling ourselves together **is**.

Hebrews 10:

24 *And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to **good works**.*"

Provoke one another to practice **True Christianity** – not **Substitute Religion**.

Bring about Godly righteousness.

James 2

James 2:

17 *"Even so faith, if it **has not works**, is dead, being alone."*

So, Brethren, we should ask the question of ourselves – what are **my works**?

The book of James is a contrast between good works and bad works – which is **substitute religion**.

Our relationship is with God through Jesus Christ. It is not through any man. Trusting in men, or their organizations, is a **lack of faith.

James 2:

1 *"You do **not** have the Faith of Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, if you have respect toward persons."*

And brethren, make no mistake about it, that means respecting their **exclusive** Corporate Organizations – as well.

James recognized that faith in *persons* **threatened** the doctrine and understanding of the True Faith and the practice of Pure Religion.

God, in His wisdom, has recorded it for us – because it applies today – as it did then.

It is **False Religion** for a minister to side with his corporate organization when they are **wrong**. God will not hold him guiltless.

Leviticus 5:

- 1 And when a person is sinning, and hear the voice of swearing, and **is a witness** [he knows about the wrongdoing], whether he hath seen or known of it; **if he do not utter it**, then he shall bear his iniquity.

The minister in the corporate organization has no option except to stand up to his organization and rectify the matter – otherwise God holds him guilty.

Will he get kicked out for taking a stand – probably so. That is what **laying your life down** for God's truth is all about!

James 1:

- 22 But be ye **doers of the word**, and not hearers only, **deceiving your own selves**.

Protestants think that their faith in Jesus is entirely sufficient for salvation, and that they do not need to be **doers of the word** or keep the Law of God.

They have been taught that Jesus did it all for us – and that there is nothing required of us except "belief."

Jesus said, "Take heed that you are not deceived" (**Luke 21:8**).

There is a faith that will not save.

We've talked about the Protestants – but James shows many examples of **Substitute Religion** that exist within the Church of God.

He warns of **Substitute Religion's** fatal consequences.

James gives us a checklist for spiritual growth and instructions on how to go on to perfection.

And, He also brings out examples of **Substitute Religion**, false religion and dead faith – let's keep our eye out for them.

Let's survey some of the places that James contrasts Substitute Religion and True Christianity.

*Substitute Religion:***James 1:**

8 [That above] A double minded man *is* unstable in all his ways. [a foot in the church and a foot in the world – actually his mind is in the world]

*Substitute Religion:***James 1:**

14 But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of **his own lust**, and enticed.

*Substitute Religion:***James 1:**

20 For the wrath of man [anger] **works not** the righteousness of God. [Anger will not produce good works]

Substitute Religion: True Christianity****James 1:**

22 But be **ye doers of the word**, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

*Substitute Religion:*****James 1:**

23 For if any be a hearer of the word, and **not a doer**, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass:

Good Works:**James 1:**

25 But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a **doer of the work**, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

*Substitute Religion:***James 1:**

26 If any man among you **seems** to be religious, and bridles not his tongue, but **deceives his own heart**, this man's religion *is* vain.

[we never know how much hurt, pain, destruction, and harm we can cause with our words.

Even a little information misapplied can ruin reputations. Guarding your tongue is a **Good Work**]

Substitute Religion: = being really good in some ways – while failing in others

People erroneously think God will overlook my weakness and sin – because I do the other things so well

James 2:

10 For whosoever **shall keep the whole law**, [that's works] and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.

Substitute Religion: & Dead Faith

James 2:

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what *doth it* profit? [it was a bunch of sentimental talk only w/o any works]

** **17** Even so faith, if it **has not works**, is dead, being alone.

Substitute Religion:

James 2:

19 You **believe** that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. [the point is: belief **alone** is insufficient]

** **20** But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith **without works** is dead? [do we sacrifice in order to help others into the KoG]

Substitute Religion: or True Christianity:

James 3:

2 For in many things **we offend all**. If any man **offend not in word**, the same *is* a perfect man, *and* able also to bridle the whole body.

Substitute Religion

James 4:

1 From whence *come* wars and fightings among you? *come they* not hence, *even* of your **lusts** that war in your members?

This vying for power and control goes on at church more than many want to believe.

Substitute Religion:

James 4:

3 Ye ask, and receive not, because ye **ask amiss**, that ye may consume *it* upon your lusts. [My way – my wants - that is not Godliness]

Substitute Religion:

James 4:

4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the **friendship of the world** is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will **be a friend of the world** is the enemy of God.

True Christianity:**James 4:**

- 7 Submit yourselves therefore to God.** [keep His Commandments – do His will]
Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.
- 8 Draw nigh to God**, and he will draw nigh to you. **Cleanse *your hands***, ye sinners; and **purify *your hearts***, ye double minded.
- 9 Be afflicted, and mourn**, and weep: [we sigh, cry, mourn, weep for those who are burdened] let your laughter be turned to mourning, and *your* joy to heaviness.

True Christianity:**James 4:**

- 10** Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

*Substitute Religion:*****James 4:**

- 11 Speak not evil** one of another, brethren. He that speaks evil of *his* brother, and judges his brother [my brother is not worthy – my brother has evil intentions], speaks evil of the law, and judges the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art **not a doer of the law**, but a judge.

I must ask myself, “will my words bring peace – will my words encourage?”

Later James will show that we are our brother's keeper and we are obligated to get involved where serious sin is involved.

*Substitute Religion:***James 4:**

- 13** Go to now, [Listen-up you] that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: [without seeking God's Will]

True Christianity:**James 4:**

- 15** For that ye *ought* to say, If it is the Lord's Will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

*Substitute Religion:***James 4:**

- 16** But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. [I, My, Me, Mine]
- ** 17** Therefore to him that **knows to do good, and does *it not***, to him it is sin. [Works are required – we must be doing, performing, sacrificing, helping in a good way]

CHAPTER 5

Substitute Religion: – Wrong Priorities

James 5:

- 1 Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.
- 2 Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.
- 3 Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

Substitute Religion: – fraudulent business practices

James 5:

- 4 Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cries: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

True Christianity:

James 5:

- 7 Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath **long patience** for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. [do we have the patience and wisdom to know what is God's will and how it will be performed]

True Christianity:

James 5:

- 14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:
- 15 And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.
- 16 Confess *your* faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual **fervent prayer of a righteous man** avails much. [we do not know who that righteous person is]

Brethren, study the entire epistle of James – his warnings are for us!

End: James the Just – Part 4