

INSPIRED TEXT MESSAGES – Part 3

TEXT MESSAGE FROM JAMES

Dr. Derek Morris

- Preaching passage: James 1:1, 2:14-26
- Subject: What the heart of the text message was that James sent to the twelve tribes scattered abroad
- Complement: how you live is evidence whether your faith is living or dead.
- Exegetical idea: James reminded the twelve tribes scattered abroad that how you live is evidence whether your faith is living or dead.
- Preaching idea: God wants you to have a living connection with Him.
- Purpose: To encourage my hearers to have a living connection with Jesus which will be seen in the way that they live.

A man of God, for whom I have the utmost respect, would have preferred us to omit a text message from James from our series on Inspired Text Messages. No, I'm not talking about Pastor Dany Hernandez! The man of God who would have omitted a text message from James was an apostate Augustian Friar named Martin Luther. The great Protestant reformer, Martin Luther, had a real problem with the text message that James sent to the twelve tribes scattered abroad. In fact, he referred to it as "an epistle of straw!"

Martin Luther was not alone in his suspicion of this text message from James. The church historian Eusebius, writing in the early 4th century placed this text message from James with the Antilegomena or the contested writings. Jerome gave a similar appraisal but noted that with time it had been universally accepted as part of the NT canon. Not until late in the 4th century was the text message from James formally listed as part of the 27 books that comprise the New Testament canon.

This is part 3 of our series on Inspired Text Messages. We have considered a text message from Paul to Philemon, reminding us that since God has shown grace to us, we ought to show grace to each other. We have examined a text message from John, the elder, warning us against deception and reminding us that walking in love and walking in the truth go hand in hand.

Today we're going to examine a text message from James—well actually, we're going to examine a portion of the text message from James—it was truncated due to size!

Let's start with James 1:1 as we ask our first question: Who? Who was the sender of this inspired text message and who was the recipient? At first glance the identity of the sender seems easy to find. What is the first word of this inspired text message? James. But then we have a follow-up question. Which James? The name Jacobos was very common in Palestine. We have several key followers of Jesus by that name: James, son of Zebedee, James son of Alphaeus, both disciples of Jesus, and James the brother of our Lord.

Whichever James this is writing the inspired text message, he is well known. He doesn't need to give his family lineage. His audience knows exactly who this is. So which James is it? We can eliminate James, son of Zebedee, the brother of John. According to Acts 12:2, this James was put to death with the sword by King Herod Agrippa, grandson of Herod the Great. This occurred in around 44 AD.

Which of the two remaining James' was most widely known among the Jewish Christians. We find a clue in the testimony of Paul, recorded in Galatians

1:18-19. “.....” The leadership of James, the brother of our Lord, in the Christian community in Jerusalem is evidenced by this comment at the council in Jerusalem in 49 AD, recorded by Dr. Luke in Acts 15:12-13. “.....”

The leadership of James, the brother of our Lord, among the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, and the fact that this inspired text message is sent to the twelve tribes scattered abroad has led many to conclude that the author of this text message is James, the brother of Jesus. James had already sent one inspired text message to the Gentile Christians. The contents of that inspired text message is found in Acts 15:23-29.

Now James, the brother of our Lord, sends an inspired text message to Jewish believers. If the author of this inspired text message is indeed James, the brother of our Lord, why doesn't he clearly say so at the beginning of his text message? He simply introduces himself as “James, of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ a servant, or a slave.” When Jesus was growing up in the home of Joseph, James, his older stepbrother, along with the other stepbrothers Joseph, Simon and Judas, was always trying to tell Jesus what to do. Even during the ministry of Jesus, the brothers of Jesus were trying to exercise their authority over Him. Only in the upper room, after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus to heaven, do we find James and the other stepbrothers of Jesus openly confessing their faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.

So now as James sends out an inspired text message he doesn't try to establish his authority. Rather, he emphasizes the authority of Jesus! James, a servant of God and of our Lord Jesus Christ.

To whom is James sending this text message? “To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.” This inspired text message is clearly intended for a Jewish audience, and specifically for Jewish Christians. The word “scattered” is a technical term, the Diaspora. It refers to the dispersion of the Jewish people, particularly during the time of the exiles in the 8th century BC when the Assyrians deported the 10 northern tribes to various parts of their Assyrian empire and the exile in the 6th century BC when the Babylonians took captives from Judah in the south, including Daniel and his three friends and brought them as prisoners of war back to Babylon.

At the end of the 70 years of Babylonian captivity, many of the Jews chose not to return to Palestine. Jews also migrated south to Egypt and established colonies there. By the first century AD, when James was writing this inspired text message, the number of Jews in the Diaspora numbered about 4.5 million in about 150 Jewish colonies outside of Palestine. It was to these Jewish brothers, and particularly to Jewish Christians in those colonies, that James addressed his inspired text message.

Many types of greetings are recorded in Scripture: “God be gracious to you”, “The LORD be with you”, “Peace be to this house,” “Grace and peace to you.” James uses a more formal introduction: “Greetings!” No specific names are mentioned. No expressions of warm affection. Just “Greetings!” James was writing to a broad audience of Jewish believers, some of whom he knew and but many of whom he had never met.

It would take a series of messages to unpack the entire contents of this inspired text message that James, brother of our Lord, wrote to Jewish believers

around the world. However, today we are going to focus on a core portion of this inspired text message: James 2:14-26. “.....”

What is James saying here? Well let’s start by asserting what James is not saying? James is not saying that salvation is earned by our works. The other inspired text messages, particularly by Paul, are very clear on this point. Ephesians 2:8-9 “.....” And if that is clear enough for you, listen to the testimony of Paul to the Galatian Christians, recorded in Galatians 2:16-17, 21. “.....”

James does not contradict the clear teaching of Scripture. Salvation is not earned by our works. That is NOT what James is saying in the core teaching of his inspired text message. Then what is James saying? Simply this: Our works of righteousness, the way that we live as followers of Jesus, is evidence that we have a living faith! We can talk all we want to about faith, but if our lives contradict what we profess with our mouths, our faith is dead.

When James says in chapter 2:26, “faith without deeds is dead,” he means dead—not just less than ideal. Faith without deeds is dead! The word in the Greek translated “dead” is nekros, from which we get the English word necrotic. Dead! Decaying! Stinking! You can talk about faith all you want, but unless your life bears witness of your faith, you don’t have a living faith. You have a dead faith.

When I was teaching at Southern Adventist University, I had an experience that I will never forget. I came into my home one day, and there was a terrible odor. No, it wasn’t me! At least I didn’t think it was me. I smelled under my armpits. No.

I hadn't eaten anything that had upset my GI! No. It wasn't me, but the smell was almost unbearable. It seemed to be located in our rec room downstairs. My wife came downstairs and helped me with the search for the smell! You say, "Why would anyone want to search for the source of a bad odor?" We wanted to get that odor out of our house. We thought maybe someone had brought something stinky in on their shoes. We crawled around on our hands and knees, smelling the carpet. No! Finally I crawled over by an electrical outlet and inhaled through my nose! Arrghh! "I found it!" A necrotic electrical outlet. I went to get my screwdriver, and latex gloves, and a mask. I was prepared. When I took off the plate covering the electrical outlet, there was a mouse, at least the head of a mouse, its necrotic eyes staring at me! I almost vomited right there! The stench was unbearable. Some of you have already guessed that happened. The mouse was trying to get through the wall and nibbled on the hot wire. Zappo! Dead! And over time, stinking!

I won't go into all of the details of how hard it was to get that necrotic mouse out of my wall. You don't want to know. But when I read that faith without deeds is dead, I can still smell that necrotic mouse in my wall!

The So What? question seems to have a simple answer: Just as the Jewish Christians in the Diaspora needed a living faith, we also need a living faith. Dead faith stinks, like a white-washed tomb filled with dead men's bones. We need a living faith. A living faith in what? James tells us in his opening remark: a living faith in God in our Lord Jesus Christ.

And how do we have a living faith? By having a living connection with God

and with His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. When you accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord of all in your life, when you surrender completely to Him, everything changes. The way that you live bears witness that you have a living connection with Jesus. Your actions bear witness that you have a living faith.

This past weekend, my friend Will won a trophy in the FLEC 5K. Will, come up here and bring your trophy with you. Will, it wasn't that many months ago that you accepted Jesus Christ as your personal Savior and you confessed your faith in Jesus through baptism. How has your life changed since that day?

(Will shares his testimony)

You told me that before you committed your life to Jesus, you couldn't even run half a mile, even if your life depended on it. Now you're winning trophies. Now I have a question for you. Is Will earning his salvation by the way he is caring for his body as a temple of God's Spirit? No. What can we learn from the way that Will is caring for his body? That he has a living faith!

Will, have you sinned since you were baptized? Would you like to list the specific sins that you have committed? No, you don't need to tell us. You only need to tell Jesus. If you have a living connection with Jesus, if you have a living faith, and you mess up, what do you do? We find the answer in another inspired text message, written by the apostle John: "If we confess our sins....." 1 John 1:9

How does it feel to have a living faith, a living connection with Jesus?

I praise God that Will in growing in grace and in a knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. I praise God that Will has a living faith. Aren't you thankful for that today!

God wants you to have a living connection with Him—a living connection with the Father and with the Son Jesus Christ, and with the Holy Spirit. God want you to have a living faith, and the way that you live, your works, will bear witness of that living faith.

Have you watched the Gospel of John on DVD yet? Have you loaded the Gospels onto your iPod? Did you get the NT on CD so that you can saturate your mind with the words of Jesus? Nurture that living connection with Jesus. Don't be preoccupied with your behavior. Focus on that living connection, that living faith. When the connection is there, your works, your behavior, your life will bear witness that you have a living faith!