

DEEP SIX STUDY

March 14th, 2021

Jesus in the Letters – “Spotting False Faith”

MESSAGE HIGHLIGHTS (You can view the full message on Facebook, live.capecodchurch.com/live, or Youtube)

Opening: After studying (almost) all of Paul's letters, our *Jesus in the Letters* series moves on this week to two letters from Jesus' brothers, James and Jude. Their letters were both written to Jewish Christians who had been driven from Jerusalem after Stephen was martyred. We might expect letters from Jesus' brothers to be "tell alls," but instead they both talk about how the story of Jesus is meant to become "the Way" of Jesus - each addressing the tensions that result when our salvation meets real life.

1. Faith and Works (James 2:14-19, 24; Romans 3:27-29)

- James—who, with Peter, was one of the original leaders of the Jerusalem church and became its first "bishop"—wrote in an intensely practical way. In many ways, his letter offers a "how-to" book on what living the Christian life should look like after we're saved by grace.
- However, as we all know, it's one thing to *know* how to live the Christian life, and it's another thing to actually live it out—because our faith is meant to produce action. As James put it, "What good is it...if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions?" (2:14)
- Famously, James *seems* to write (2:24) that "faith alone" isn't enough to save us—in stark contrast to Paul's famous admonitions to the Romans, among others, that our salvation is based on "faith alone" (Romans 3:27).
- However, we must consider the different audiences Paul and James wrote to. In Romans (and elsewhere), Paul wrote to contradict those who taught that to be "Christians," new believers had to follow Jewish law. James, however, wrote to those who thought that they could separate what they believed from how they lived—somehow making their faith just about "intellectual assent."
- In actuality, James and Paul shared the same message: that God saves us through faith in Jesus Christ ("faith alone"), so that we can live our lives fully from him (by our "good works"). In other words, when it comes to our good works, he saves us "so that," not "by that."

2. License and Liberty (Jude 1:1-4, 25)

- Jude writes to warn the dispersed Christians against the idea that God's saving grace allows us to live however we want—that our salvation by "faith alone" means we can live "immoral lives" (v. 4).
- Jude pokes at the tension between *liberty* and *license* for followers of Jesus. Clearly, he writes, Jesus set us free from condemnation of sin (liberty). However, he *didn't* set us free so that we could sin more (license)—to think that is to deny that Jesus is now the Lord of our lives.
- God saves us right where we are; but he loves us too much to leave us there. His Holy Spirit inside of us wants to transform us (believers) from the inside out, to make us more and more like Jesus.

- Honestly, if you've never felt the prodding (conviction) to become more like Jesus after you met and believed in Jesus, you probably never really met the real Jesus. He wants you to live fully!

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE

These passages may provide additional insights related to the subject of this week's message. Verses from NLT unless otherwise noted.

Matthew 5:14-16; Romans 12:1-2; Ephesians 2:8-10; Colossians 3:1-10; Titus 2:11-14

Videos of the Week: James and Jude by the Bible Project (<https://bibleproject.com/explore/book-overviews/>)

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What special challenges do you think James and Jude (as Jesus' brothers) might have faced as Christian leaders in the early church?
2. Why is it such a challenge to live out the Christian life we're called to live, even though we have plenty of "how to" information from writers like James?
3. Read James 2:14-17 again. How would you respond to someone who might assert that James is saying that you have to do good works for others in order to be saved?
4. Now read Romans 3:27 again. How would you respond to someone who might assert that Paul is saying that it doesn't matter what you do once you're saved because your faith alone saves you?
5. In your own words, describe the tension Jude addresses—the tension between the *liberty* that frees us from sin when we're saved and the *license* to sin all we want once we're saved.
6. After hearing this message, how have your thoughts changed regarding the relationship between faith and works (i.e., between what we believe and how we live)?