

James the Just and the Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15:3-9 (v. 7)

The resurrection of Christ is not hard to believe. It is easy to believe. It is so easy even a child can believe it. Why is it easy for a child to believe? Children have child-like faith; that is, a humble, unpretentious faith.

Jesus said (Luke 18:17): "Truly I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all." GR receive = "to take into one's open hands with joy." Tell a child to close his/her eyes and open his/her hands to receive a candy and he/she will joyfully do it. When a child knows an adult loves him/her, then the child will believe what the adult tells him/her. When a child knows that God loves him/her then belief in the resurrection is easy.

I have a DMin in apologetics, but children don't need apologetics to believe in the resurrection of Christ. If God created the earth and people then he can raise people from the dead.

But it is hard for some adults to believe. Adults create ludicrous theories to explain away the resurrection of Christ. Adults have doubts and need evidence. When I think of people in the Bible who had a difficult time believing Jesus' identity and the resurrection, I think of James, Jesus' brother.

James the Unbeliever

(Scriptures referenced: Matthew 13:53-58; Mark 3:20-22; John 7:1-5)

Who was James? Paul called James "the brother of our Lord" (Galatians 1:19). The GR word *adelphos* can mean blood brother, near kinsman, or a relative. We do not know if James was the son of Joseph and Mary after Jesus' miraculous virgin birth, or a stepbrother because Joseph had children from a previous marriage, or James was a cousin, the son of Joseph's brother. I will assume James was the son of Joseph and Mary; that they had 3 other sons and 2 daughters. (It is probably better to call him Jesus' stepbrother because Jesus' real father was God and James' father was Joseph. So Joseph would be

Jesus' stepfather not being his natural or biological father.) I hope you are not confused.

The point is James was the skeptical, mocking, and unbelieving "brother" of Jesus.

Imagine James growing up with Jesus in Nazareth. James knew his brother as a normal person. He slept. He ate. Nothing unusual. Jesus took over his father's business as a carpenter and worked to support his brothers and sisters. As a carpenter he worked with wood and leather to make things. Jesus did not make wood and leather miraculously appear out of nothing. He had to cut down trees and tan animal hides. Jesus did not miraculously multiply loaves of bread and eggs for breakfast. Jesus did not miraculously heal family members who got sick.

When Jesus began his ministry around 30 years old (Luke 3:23) and his name became known, his family rejected him.

Jesus taught in his hometown synagogue and the skeptical people questioned, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" And they took offense at him. (Matthew 13:53-58) The GR word for "took offense" is scandal. A scandal is a "stumbling block." Familiarity with Jesus' family life in Nazareth was a stumbling block to their belief. Jesus was the "scandal" of Nazareth and the people were embarrassed by him. I guarantee Jesus' 4 brothers agreed with the people of Nazareth.

Mark 3:20-22: *Then Jesus went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."* Jesus' family thought he was a lunatic and the religious leaders thought he was demon-possessed.

John 7:1-5: *After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him. Now the Jews' Feast of Booths was at hand. So his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples also may see the works you are doing. For no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you really do these miracles, show yourself to the world." For not even his brothers believed in him.* Jesus' brothers mocked him. They wanted Jesus to leave Galilee. They taunted him and told him to go to Jerusalem and perform some miracles there. "For not even his brothers believed in him."

James the Just: Leader of Jerusalem Church

(Scriptures referenced: Galatians 2:7-9; Acts 15)

The next time we find James in the Bible he is senior pastor of the Jerusalem Church. Apostle Peter transferred church leadership to James after his narrow escape from death when James the brother of John was killed: Acts 12:17. Paul referred to James as one of the 3 apostolic pillars of the Jerusalem church: James, Cephas/Peter, and John (Galatians 2:7-9). He earned the name "James the Just" for his righteous character. James was respected by all 7 sects of Judaism. (James the Just probably replaced James the Apostle, brother of John, the sons of Zebedee, after James was murdered by King Herod: Acts 12:2.)

James the Just presided over the important Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). The Council recognized the successful ministry of Paul and Barnabas among the "uncircumcised" Gentiles. James had the final word at the Council meeting. Gentiles do not need to keep the Law of Moses to be saved, but for the sake of fellowship with Jews, Gentiles ought not to eat food sacrificed to idols, blood, or commit sexual immorality.

James even wrote a letter that became part of the New Testament. Read James' Jewish letter and you will understand why he was called "James the Just."

James the Martyr

(Historical works of Josephus and Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea)

James the Just was martyred for his testimony. This is not recorded in Scripture, but the story is told by second century church leaders.

James the Just was martyred around AD 62. Angry Pharisees forced him to the pinnacle of the temple and told him to deny Jesus and declare to the crowd below that Jesus of Nazareth was a false messiah. (This is the same pinnacle of the temple Satan took Jesus to for temptation to jump off and angels would catch him: Luke 4:9-11.) The Jewish leaders said, "James, everyone respects you as a righteous man. The people are led astray, so tell them Jesus the crucified man is not the Messiah." James saw this as an opportunity to be a witness and said, "Why do you ask me about Jesus, the Son of Man? He sits in heaven at the right hand of the great Power, and he will soon come on the clouds of heaven!" The people below shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" The Pharisees realized their mistake and pushed him off. The fall did not kill James. As James prayed, "Lord forgive them. They do not know what they are doing," they stoned him and hit him in the head with a club and killed him. About 4 years after this the judgement Jesus predicted happened. The Roman army laid siege to Jerusalem and the Christians fled the city.

Nobody would die for something he/she knows to be a lie. So what convinced James the brother of Jesus?

James the Convinced Believer

(Main scripture: 1 Corinthians 15:3-9)

What changed James from unbeliever to James the Just, leader of the Jerusalem Church, and then martyrdom. Apparently Jesus' teaching and miracles were not enough. Remember the scandal at Nazareth.

So, how did Jesus overcome all James' doubt and skepticism? What convinced Jesus' own family that he was who he claimed to be - the Son of God, the Messiah promised in the OT? It can only be the resurrection.

The life changing proof for James was Jesus' resurrection. Jesus made a special post-resurrection appearance to James: 1 Corinthians 15:3-9 (v. 7): *For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. **Then he appeared to James**, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.*

The resurrection convinced James that his big brother was who he claimed to be. James knew who Jesus claimed to be but did not believe it until after the resurrection.

Whether it is easy or hard to believe it is true.

Resurrection means Jesus Christ is who he claimed to be: God's one and only begotten Son (John 3:16), the Messiah and Savior.

Resurrection means Jesus' death on the cross was an atonement for our sins. (We remember this with Communion.) An atonement is a substitutionary sacrifice. For thousands of years animals were sacrificed to satisfy the justice of God and provide forgiveness of sins.

Resurrection means we can have eternal life in resurrection bodies.

Resurrection means we have HOPE in a world that is descending into lawless darkness.

Resurrection means Jesus will return and rule over this world.

Resurrection requires a response. You can deny it or believe it. It is easy to believe. Believe it with a humble, unpretentious child-like faith.