

- The Minor Festivals of the Church Year -

St. James of Jerusalem - October 23

An Ossuary is a place where the bones of a dead person are laid to rest. An ossuary could be anything from a chest, a well, a cavern, or a constructed building, anything used to store the bones of the dead. One common practice of Jesus day was to use ossuary boxes, or bone boxes, little 2 foot by 2 foot squares made out of limestone. Back in 2002, such a box was discovered in an antiques dealer's private collection, an ossuary bone box that had an inscription etched into the side, written in Aramaic, it reads... "James, son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus." This discovery under the Biblical Archeology Review made national headlines, because if authentic it would be the earliest written reference to Jesus ever found.

The Gospel of Matthew lists the other sons and daughters Mary and Joseph had after Jesus (Matthew 13:55) , and since James is listed first, he probably was the eldest of all the children. Later on in the Gospel of John, it becomes clear that growing up, James did not believe that Jesus was God's promised Messiah (John 7:5). It's not hard for us to see James probably had a hard time accepting the fact that his older brother would grow up and somehow become the Savior of the world. Not only did Jesus say that no prophet is accepted his in his home town (Mark 6:4), but even much harder for Jesus to be accepted as the Christ among the siblings of his own home. It wasn't until after the resurrection that James came to believe. James had seen his brother accused and sentenced to death, he had witnessed his brother's crucifixion, he had seen his brother die and buried in a tomb. Only when Jesus personally appeared to James after his resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:3-8), did James believe that this brother who was once dead, is now alive and lives, and he is the living Savior and God. From that time James would go on and become a prominent leader in the church of Jerusalem.

The Apostle Paul would later on call James a pillar of the church for his adherence to the laws of the Old Testament and to the Gospel of Jesus. During the years James led the church in Jerusalem, James led the church through a severe famine in which many of the Christians were suffering. He struggled to incorporate the Gentile believers into the church against the opposition of the Jewish believers. He was loved by the people as a protector of their Jewish heritage, but he was hated by the Jewish leaders who thought James was forsaking his Jewish heritage by bringing Gentiles into the church. So when the Roman Governor Festus died in 62 AD and there was a change over in power, the Jewish opposition saw their chance. They grabbed James took him outside the temple and stoned him. James of Jerusalem was martyred in the year 62 AD but while dying still clinging to his faith in Christ, his Savior, his Lord, his brother.

The book of James in the Holy Scriptures was written by this James of Jerusalem. Himself knowing struggles, persecutions, and sufferings for the sake of Christ. He writes to encourage all Christians everywhere to not just hold onto their faith but to live out their faith against all earthly opposition. This world has enough hardships, sufferings, heartaches, and sorrows to suck the joy out of any heart. But James this morning gives us hope as he writes, "*Consider it pure joy, when you face trials of many kinds*" (James 1:2-4). We can be joyful in the midst of our earthly suffering because in Christ we have the confidence of our salvation.

After Jesus ascension into heaven, the apostles, like James of Jerusalem, went out to proclaim the name of Christ to the world. As they lived and preached their Christian faith, some of them were killed, some mistreated, and some imprisoned. They suffered injustice, and suffered criticism. There were those who wanted them silenced, those who wanted them discredited, and those who wanted to run them out of town. But even in the midst of such suffering and trial, it was the Apostle Paul who wrote, "*We are hard pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed at times but not in despair, persecuted but not abandoned, struck down but not destroyed*" (2 Corinthians 4:8). You could say the Lord allowed his apostles to endure such sufferings and trials so that the world could see the commitment and confidence of their faith.

The Lord gave us James of Jerusalem, so that through his unbelief and then belief, through his leadership of the church and then suffering for the sake of Christ, he would write to encourage us today. May the world always see Christian men and Christian women whose trust is firmly in the Lord. No matter what our outward circumstances, we are Christians who find joy in Jesus, living each day in the confidence of our salvation.

Read **James Chapter 1**.... as today's Scripture Lesson.

Blessings to you and your families,
Pastor Matthew Guse