

In July and August we've been looking at the Book of James on a Sunday evening. James was one of Jesus' half-brothers. He became a very prominent follower of Jesus after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension. He led the Church in Jerusalem but was martyred in around 62AD.

I wonder how he felt about Jesus when he was a youngster and as he was growing up. We know very little about Jesus when he was a child and then in His 20s. Nearly all of the information we have about Jesus is concerned with when He was about 30 and then for the next three years of His physical life, culminating with His death on the cross outside of Jerusalem and then His resurrection and ascension into heaven.

In the first two chapters of Matthew we read of Jesus very early life, how He and His parents were visited by the magi and then they escaped to Egypt due to King Herod's actions. In chapter three we're straight into John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism in the River Jordan.

The Gospel of Mark takes us straight to John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism.

In John's Gospel we have a brilliant Prologue of 18 verses, before again we hear about John the Baptist and Jesus' baptism.

Luke's Gospel tells us a little more about Jesus' birth and childhood. In two chapters we read about how Mary was visited by the angel Gabriel and after Jesus was born in Bethlehem then shepherds visit Him and His mum and dad. There's also the short story in chapter two of how Jesus and His family (which would have probably included James by then, went to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover for a few days, but Jesus didn't return with His parents, so they had to go back to Jerusalem to look for Him. They found Him in the Temple talking to and listening people who knew a lot about the Old Testament.

I wonder what James thought about these strange goings on? How did Mary and Joseph explain things to James and his other brothers and sisters? They'd been visited by an angel, so they knew that Jesus was more than a special baby (as all babies are special), they knew that Jesus was the Son of God. Jesus was

exceedingly special! After Jesus had died, something happened in James's life to make Him accept Him as his own Lord and Saviour.

It wasn't enough for James to physically know Jesus in an intimate way and perhaps to spend at least 15 years with Him on a daily basis and then after that to come across Him on a very regular basis. James had to make His own decision about Jesus. His parents' faith in Jesus was important, but it wasn't enough. He had to make his own decision to follow Jesus too. We might know other people that have a sincere and genuine relationship with Jesus, but we have to make our own decision and say, "Yes, Jesus, be my Lord and Saviour. I need You in my life! My life is pretty ok as it is but come and transform me. Deal with the issue of sin in my life. Come and make me a new creation. Thank You for adopting me into Your family."

James knew the physical Jesus very well in the first half of his life and in the last thirty years or so he got to know Jesus in a very different way. He probably wrote this letter slightly before 50AD.

Our First Reading was the very end of what he wrote. A very practical man, he describes how prayer is a very practical thing to do in whatever situation we find ourselves in. Prayer is simply communication with God.

Proseuchomai is the Greek word for prayer in verse 13. Like in the English language, in Greek we often have a long word that is made up of two smaller words. Pros means "to exchange or towards", whereas euxomai to wish or pray. Put these two smaller words together, you can get a wonderful definition of prayer: to interact with the Lord by switching human wishes (ideas) for His wishes as He imparts faith ("divine persuasion"). James had interacted with the physical Jesus literally thousands of times as he was growing up, now James knows that this is still possible and encourages his readers to interact with Jesus in whatever situations they find themselves in.

Many people interacted with God did in the Bible: Abraham, Jonah, Nehemiah, Isaiah, Zacchaeus, Nicodemus and the Twelve disciples are amongst hundreds and hundreds who did then. Jesus changed them. He is wonderful!

It's still possible to interact with God today. Wherever we find ourselves geographically, emotionally, socially or economically, we can reach out in prayer to God and He *will* answer us.

I first started following Jesus around October 1983. I was nearly 16 and had been to church all my life. It dawned on me that God was real and wanted a real relationship with a lad who was interested in music and maps – me! I hadn't done anything really nasty or wrong to other people, but I realised that my life wasn't good. I'd sung songs about God being holy and I knew that I wasn't and would never be due to any thing that I could do for myself. Heaven wouldn't be perfect and lovely if I'd been allowed in!

After 36 years I'm still learning how to pray. I know that the Lord reigns and that I want to exalt Him above everything else. That's the bedrock of prayer for me – knowing that God reigns and that He wishes to spend time with me. He wants to bless me with His gifts of loving others and standing up for others when they're not able.

I have never seen Jesus as a baby, though I've heard dozens of Talks about that at Christmas time. However, I know for a fact that Jesus died for me, rose again and then returned to heaven. I can now spend time with Him, exchanging my ideas for His. That's a brilliant thing to do. I want to encourage you to pray before you go to sleep tonight and when you first wake in the morning. Tell God what is on your mind, then open your heart to His ways and His commands. Follow what He says as you exchange your ideas for His.

In September and October, we shall be looking at the book of Ruth. Both Paul and I will be away when we meet next on 1st September, so David Rhodes will be leading the Service and discussing chapter 1 of Ruth.