

January 12, 2014  
Authentic Christianity

*Authentic Christianity Perseveres*  
James 1:1-4

**Opening words:** Today, I begin a new seven part sermon series called *Authentic Christianity*. By the time we are done, we will have examined the epistle of James. Before we begin, it is important that you know three things about this letter.

1. It was written during the 60's (first century A.D.).
2. The author of this letter is James. The question is, which James? Like today, James was a common name in Jesus' day. There are four New Testament characters by the name of James, but only one could have been the author of this letter. The author of this epistle was the half-brother of Jesus. They shared a common mother, Mary. It was their fathers who were different. James was the son of Joseph; Jesus was the son of God.
3. James' faith evolves. In other words, he was not an instant believer in Jesus. At first, James even questioned Jesus' authority. (John 7:2-5) However, at some point, he accepted the fact that his brother was the long-awaited Messiah, and today is remembered as one of the true leaders of the church.

With this basic understanding, let us hear this morning's scripture lesson, James 1:1-4. Let me call this message *Authentic Christianity Perseveres*.

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**James 1:1-4** James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,  
To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations:  
Greetings.

<sup>2</sup> Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds,  
<sup>3</sup> because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. <sup>4</sup> Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

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Young William Wilberforce was discouraged one night in the early 1790s after another defeat in his 10 year battle against the slave trade in England. Tired and frustrated, he opened his Bible and began to leaf through it. A small piece of paper fell out and fluttered to the floor. It was a letter written by John Wesley shortly before his death. This is what that letter said:

**Unless the divine power has raised you up... I see not how you can go through your glorious enterprise in opposing that (abominable practice of slavery), which is the scandal of religion, of England, and of human nature. Unless God has raised you up for this very thing, you will be worn out by the opposition of men and devils. But if God be for you, who can be against you? Are all of them together stronger than God?**

**Oh, be not weary of well-doing. Go on in the name of God, and in the power of His might.**

John Wesley was reminding William Wilberforce of the same thing that James is reminding us. We are only soldiers in a great spiritual battle. It is God, Himself, who goes ahead of us. It is God, Himself, who will claim the final victory. The only thing we are required to do is persevere. And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**" Let us look at this morning's text together.

In the next seven weeks we are going to be looking at the epistle of James. This morning we are looking at the first four verses of the letter. In verse one we are told James is writing this letter to the twelve scattered tribes among the nations. Who were these people? It is not as mysterious as it sounds. The answer is simple. They were members of the early church, who left Jerusalem. They didn't leave the Golden City because they wanted to go. They left the Golden City because they had to go. You remember the story. After the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1), the rules changed. Their safety was no longer guaranteed. Their greatest fear was to end up like Stephen, dead. Every one dreams of the perfection of heaven, but no one is in a hurry to go. They left for their own safety. Now let me state the obvious. This was not a time of advanced communication. There were no cell phones, texts or e-mails. When you left, you were gone. James didn't know what was happening to his people, so he expects the worst. That is why the first topic he addresses is trials. If they were going to remain in the faith, then they must persevere.

The world has changed a great deal in 2,000 years. In some ways, we have made some great advances. The advancement of medical knowledge and practice is impressive in the past 100 years. That is why people are living longer all the time. The advancement of communication is impressive over the past 100 years. E-mail and Skype have made our world very small. The advancement of transportation in the past 100 years is impressive. Flying to Florida is very common. My wife, Kathryn, and her mission team will be traveling to Ukraine in May. They will travel that distance in less than a day. In certain ways the world has changed a great deal in the past 2,000 years. However, in other ways, our world has remained the same in 2,000 years.

Two thousand years ago, being a follower of Jesus Christ meant you were in the minority. The percentage of true believers was very small. They were a minority who were not welcomed by their world. Guess what? Two thousand years later, being a follower of Jesus Christ means you are still in the minority. I am not talking about being a church member. I am talking about being a disciple of Jesus Christ. I am talking about actually having a relationship with God that is altering the way you live. It is altering the way you spend your time. It is altering the way you spend your money. It is altering your personal opinions. However, it is also altering the way that other people look at you and relate to you. If Jesus Christ really is altering your life, then you truly are in the minority. You know it is true. The majority is always trying to tell the minority

to compromise this relationship with Jesus and conform to what the rest of the world is doing.

Today, I want to talk about three things we must never compromise. I am sure there are more, but I only have time to look at three. In the face of public opinion, we are going to persevere. What are the three? First, we will never compromise **Jesus**. No, he is not like the other leaders of world religions. He is different. He was the incarnation of God and our only hope of salvation. Second, we will never compromise the **Bible**. We really don't care what other sacred texts say. We really don't care what modern philosophical writings are proclaiming. They are not the Bible, the inspired word of God. Third, we will never compromise the **church**. I am not going to talk about committees and buildings. However, I am going to talk about the group of true believers, who refuse to compromise their relationship with Jesus. This whole message revolves around verse 4, "*Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete.*" So if you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**"

### **Jesus**

How many of you know the name Craig James? He was a star running back at Southern Methodist University. In time, he ended up playing for the New England Patriots. After his playing days, he turned to broadcasting. You may remember him on ESPN. In 2012 he decided to run for the US Senate, but failed in the primaries. He returned to broadcasting, signing with Fox Sports. His employment didn't last long because someone discovered what he said on the campaign trail. He ran on a platform against gay marriage. Those words as a candidate cost him his job as a sportscaster. Today, I do not want to defend or attack gay marriage. However, I do want to say this. You had better be careful what you say. Each one of us is expected to live within the boundaries of political correctness. If you are going to tell everyone Jesus is your only hope of salvation, then you are telling all the other religions they are wrong. In the world of political correctness, everyone is right and no one is wrong. If you are going to promote Jesus, then you had better be prepared for the consequences.

First, we will never compromise Jesus. This letter is not just written to anyone. It is written to that small group of people who really believed. Their names and stories differed, but somewhere in their lives they experienced Jesus. The question is not, how did you come to know Jesus? The question is, have you experienced Jesus? Once you experience Jesus, everything changes. Jesus wasn't just a good man. Jesus wasn't just a wise man. Jesus wasn't just an interesting man. Jesus was not just a motivational speaker. Jesus was the incarnation of God, who was the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world. He is our only hope of salvation. How could you ever compromise Jesus? If you will never compromise Jesus, say, "**Amen!**" Jesus runs through the next two points.

### **The Bible**

One of my favorite Bible stories comes from the eighth chapter of Acts. You know the story. We have looked at it in the past. The main character is Philip. He was directed by

an angel to go to the road that runs between Gaza and Jerusalem. Philip does what he is told and meets a foreigner. The scriptures identify him as an Ethiopian eunuch. His life is complex for a variety of reasons. When Philip meets him, he is trying to untangle the mess. With nowhere else to go, he is reading the scriptures. The problem is, he didn't understand what he was reading. Does anyone here have a hard time understanding the Bible? The good news is, Philip helped him understand what he was reading. He was reading from the suffering servant passage, Isaiah 53. Generally speaking, it is a chapter about Jesus.

As a matter of fact, every word in the Bible is about Jesus. The Old Testament is about everything that happened before Jesus' birth. The Gospels are about Jesus' life, death and resurrection. The book of Acts is about the Holy Spirit and the creation of Jesus' bride, the church. The rest of the Bible is filled with testimonies about the difference that Jesus made. Revelation is about how Jesus wins in the end. Second, we will never compromise the Bible because it is all about Jesus, our Lord and Savior. If you will never compromise the Bible, say, **"Amen!"**

### **The Church**

It is hard to believe that I began serving in the United Methodist Church nearly 29 years ago. Time goes so quickly. When I was going through the ordination process, I was required to turn in a certain amount of paperwork. One of the papers I wrote was on Ecclesiology, the study of the church. I learned something while I was writing that paper that I have never forgotten. Paul and Peter viewed the church in two different ways. Paul believed the church was visible. In other words, he believed everyone who is present today was part of the true church. Peter believed the church is invisible. He believed your attendance is only one sign that you are part of the true church. He believed that only God knows who makes up the true church. In other words, you can be a member of a church and not be part of the true church. I believe Peter is correct. What do you believe? Let me go a few more steps down that road.

I believe man-made denominations mean very little to God. The only thing that really matters is your belief in the resurrection. That is Biblical. Romans 10:9 says, *"... if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."* Many believe that verse is the very first creed in the church. Your belief and witness of the resurrection is everything. That is why I have very little problem crossing denominational lines. Presbyterians and Lutherans believe in the resurrection. Non-denominational churches believe in the resurrection. The Roman Catholic Church believes in the resurrection. The Orthodox Church believes in the resurrection. The traditions of all these churches are different. I am not saying I accept all their practices and beliefs. I don't accept everything about the United Methodist Church. However, I do believe in the resurrection, and I am open to any group that believes in the resurrection of Jesus. Maybe the devil is in the details? Maybe instead of promoting our differences, we should promote what we have in common, the resurrection of Jesus! People promote differences. God promotes what we have in common.

Third and finally, we will never compromise the church. Because job number one in every church is the resurrection of Jesus. Administrative structure really doesn't matter. The number of small groups you have really doesn't matter. The denominational name on the sign doesn't really matter. What really matters? The only thing that really matters in the life of the church is the resurrection of Jesus. On the day we stop talking about the resurrection of Jesus, we will stop being the church that God intended. For this reason, we will never compromise the church. If you will never compromise the church, say, "**Amen!**" Let me end with this story.

History remembers Andrew Jackson as a great general and leader. His boyhood friends remembered him in a different way. They knew of other men who had greater talent, but who never succeeded. One of Jackson's friends said, "Why, Jim Brown, who lived right down the pike from Jackson, was not only smarter, but he could throw Andy three times out of four in a wrestling match. But look where Andy is now." Another friend responded, "How did there happen to be a fourth time? Didn't they usually say three times and out?" "Sure, they were supposed to, but not Andy. He would never admit he was beat -- he would never stay 'thrown.' Jim Brown would get tired, and on the fourth try, Andrew Jackson would throw him and be the winner." Picking up on that idea, someone has said, "The thing that counts is not how many times you are 'thrown,' but whether you are willing to stay 'thrown'." I think there is a lesson there for us!

Let there be no doubt about it. We are in the middle of a great spiritual battle. We are nothing more than soldiers. In our lives, we will experience both victory and defeat. However, in the end God, will win and we will reap the benefits. All we are asked to do is persevere. We will never give up on **Jesus**. He is our only hope of salvation. We will never give up on the **Bible**. It is the inspired word of God. It is all about Jesus. We will never give up the **church**. The true church can't stop talking about Jesus. It is the bride of Christ. Who will tell the world about our risen Savior if the church fails? Scottish naturalist Walter Elliot once said, "*Perseverance is not a long race; it is many short races one after the other.*" And all of God people said, "**Amen!**"