

BRETHREN OF THE LORD

"But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother." Galatians 1:19.

This James was not one of the twelve apostles. He was neither James, the son of Zebedee, nor James, the son of Alphaeus. He was the son of Joseph and Mary, our Lord's half brother. We are not told just when he became a disciple of Christ.

James was closely associated with the apostles in the Jerusalem church, which he seemed to serve as pastor. The special appearance of the resurrected Christ to James lends much dignity to his position in the early church. He was chairman and spokesman of the Jerusalem Council, which decreed that Jewish Law was not binding on Gentile converts. In the end, he suffered martyrdom for his half brother, Jesus Christ, by being thrown from the pinnacle of the temple and then clubbed to death. So we are fond of "James, the Lord's brother." Let us study together this striking phrase.

I. A Great Honor.

It was a great honor to James to be called "the Lord's brother" wherever he went. Imagine with what loving reverence the apostles and their friends would speak of one who would be called such a sacred name. When James was called that he would feel honor had been done him.

Christians, by new birth, we are born into God's family and are thereby made sons of God. Thus, we become brothers and sisters of Christ. "For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." Hebrews 2:11-12. Think of yourself as bearing this title. What a superb honor! What eminence and dignity!

Christ is not ashamed of me. I ought not to be ashamed or embarrassed to own Him before the wicked world. He is my brother, the dearest of kin. I am happy to let people know of this exalted relationship. How people boast over their ancestry and family ties! If they are a thirty-second cousin of some famous person, they make sure everybody knows it. The greatest source of heart joy is in the consciousness that Jesus Christ is my brother.

With reverent tones the apostles would introduce others to James, and say, "This is James, the Lord's brother." How much it must have meant to James to be introduced like that. He was never embarrassed by it. He was glad to be called "the Lord's brother."

Whether it is in a spirit of ridicule or of reverence that we are introduced thus, let us lift our heads high and rejoice over the honor paid us.

II. A Gigantic Obligation.

A solemn and gigantic responsibility rested on James because of the fact that he was a brother of the Lord. It must have sobered the spirit of James and prompted him to watchfulness over his conduct and spirit and life to have been constantly regarded and continually presented to strangers as the brother of Jesus Christ. It gave him a very keen sense of responsibility for maintaining the honor of Jesus. It involved the good name of his family, his reputation and standing of everything that was dear to his heart. He must have lived carefully. He must have tried to live so that those who met him would be impressed with his resemblance to his brother, Jesus.

Why should it not be so with us, who profess to be Christians? We have been redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus. He sought after us as poor, lost sinners, and He has saved us. In the truest sense we are brethren of the Lord. If He is not ashamed of us and is willing to call us brethren and trust His good name in our keeping, we

ought to accept at once the privilege as a grave responsibility. If we are known as such, then others will form their opinions of Jesus by what they see in us, His brethren. The name of the whole family of Christ is committed as a sacred trust to you and to me for our keeping. It makes one fairly tremble when once he senses this grave responsibility, wondering if he has justified the confidence that Jesus reposed in him when He called him to be His brother.

A young person wrote Henry Ward Beecher and asked, "What is the best commentary I can have on the Bible?" Beecher replied, "I cannot send the one I have in mind, because the only commentary of the Bible that is really of much value is a person that is living the Bible; and, really, a Christian is the best commentary on the New Testament that anybody can have. But there are not enough such commentaries to send out. The edition is small." Beecher was right. What a tragedy that the edition is so small!

If we assume to have the life of God, we must prove it by our works. No other evidence will satisfy an unbelieving age. When people see us, they must be able to recognize the type-mark of Christ Jesus. They must think of the Master. They should be able to see in us the reproduction of His life and example. If we are brothers and sisters of the Lord, then we must let the unbelieving see the family resemblance. Men and women form their opinions of Jesus in what they see in us.

Some years ago a class separated for twenty years gathered in reunion at Yale University. Twenty-five men were gathered around the table, when the door opened and another entered, bowed in form, leaning heavily on a staff, his face deeply furrowed, his hair whitened. He looked into the face of one and another. No man knew him. His had been a hard life. The burden of disease had bowed him down and taken the vitality out of his life. He spoke to all and called them by name, stepped to the door and beckoned, and came in again leaning on the strong arm of a boy eighteen, and when they saw the boy, with one accord, they spoke the father's name. The type was repeated in the boy. The type of Jesus should be repeated in us, His brethren.

Christianity is more than a profession; it is a possession. It is more than the Book—that only describes Christian living; more than creed—that only analyzes Christian life; more than the Sermon on the Mount—that is only the Architect's plan, while the Christian is the Cathedral. It is a vital inward force, the living Christ within a living soul, building a ripe character. The Sermon on the Mount is but an outline sketch of the idea Christian. It is verbal description of what Christ was and what His disciples are to be. It is His sketch of what He wants you to become. You are to translate it into pure thought, into holy deeds, into stern resolves, until your intellect is clear and your will strong. It is your task to incarnate ideal sermons.

In other words, you are to live out the life Christ lives in you. So walk and talk that no wicked person can be in your company for an hour without feeling ashamed of himself. You should behave like a Christian, not because you want people to think you are pious, but because you are a Christian. Be like Christ and live like Christ.

Christ has His garden, and the flowers that bloom there are the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Hate is not there, nor envy, nor strife. Vulgarities and covetousness have been expelled. Love, joy and peace are there. This garden, with all its loveliness, should be growing in every believer's heart. Brethren of the Lord should be pure, gentle, noble, kind in thought, worthy in act, right toward man in the sight of God, and constantly growing into Christlikeness.

III. A Glorious Opportunity.

To live so true that Jesus is recommended by our service is a magnificent opportunity

and a glorious privilege. If being the Lord's brethren involves sober responsibility, it also means the glorious privilege of serving a lost and needy world.

Many are waiting to turn to Christ when the brethren of the Lord demonstrate Christianity to them. The world is waiting to see men like Christ. The world needs more men like Him. It needs men who are like Him in their mastery of self, the largeness of their outlook, the breadth of their sympathy, the singleness of their aim, the wholeness and completeness of their character; men in whom the high aspirations have blossomed into act; men who can be trusted; upon whom right causes may be safely built. The world needs these kinds of men. Many will turn to Christ when they appear. When people know that we "have been with Jesus and have learned of Him," they will want to join us.

Have you always remembered your gigantic obligation, and been as faithful to Jesus, your brother, as you should have been? Has your testimony for Christ been irregular? Have you been good witnesses and then poor ones? Do you glorify the Lord sometimes, and libel Him at others?

Many are barren, dry, fruitless and joyless. They have robbed themselves of heavenly things. Through neglect and indifference they have covered over their religion. They are like the little girl rummaging through the trunk, who found her mother's church letter. She rushed to her mother and said, "O mamma, I've found your religion in the trunk!" Many have their "religion" in the trunk. It is far better to bring it out and let it bear testimony for Christ.

The unsaved surely must be longing to become in deed and in truth brethren of the Lord. What if your sins have piled up like mountains? He comes over the mountains with the good news of salvation. He will lift you up out of the mud and mire of your sin onto the solid rock, up into the sunlight of loving brotherhood with Himself. Do not refuse Him. It is a brother's hand that is offered. It is a brother's heart that beats in sympathy with yours. It is another's fellowship that will make all the years to come a happy pilgrimage to the skies. Ever afterward you will be known as brethren of the Lord. May everybody become and be brothers of the Lord or sisters of the Lord.