

As many of you know, in the fall of last year, Keren and I welcomed our second child into the world. A sweet little girl named Addie Hope. There have been quite a few requests, mostly from the older ladies in our church for a few updated pictures...and if there is one thing I've learned in ministry, it's to listen to the women with grey hair! Here's my little one. Come on now! Having a daughter is one of the sweetest things in the world. One of the most frequent questions I have been asked is: "What's your favorite part of having a second kid?" And though I've never been able to narrow it down to just one answer, one of my favorite things is watching my children play together. Look at the two of them! Obviously, they are both still small, but Hudson will bring her toys and stuffed animals, and wherever he goes, she follows him with her gaze all around the room, and anytime she cries, Hudson will say, "Addie needs help!" drop whatever he is doing and run right to her. Siblings are one of life's greatest gifts.

A few weeks ago, a woman named Ashley posted this video of her younger son beginning to throw a tantrum, and her older son stepping in to help out. [Take a look](#). Now that is some good brother action going on right there.

I have a brother who is about two years younger than me, and when we were younger, take a look at us. Let's take a little survey: for those of you who have siblings, when you were growing up, how many of you were basically best friends? How many of you fought all the time? I was in the latter group. My brother and I could have used a few more breathing exercises in our life. One time, when we were in high school, we got into a wrestling match in the entryway to our house. I had my brother in a headlock, I pushed him against the wall, and he went through the wall! So right when you walked into our house, there was a full body sized hole in our house. And even though he made the hole, somehow I had to pay for it!

We are kicking today off talking about siblings because we are beginning a brand new series today called *Awaken*, where we are going to walk through the book of James together, a book that was written by Jesus' brother. Now technically, James was considered Jesus' half-brother. Jesus was both fully God and fully man. The Bible tells us that Jesus was not conceived by man and a woman coming together, but rather the Holy Spirit of God moved in Mary's life and she miraculously conceived, allowing Jesus to be both fully God and fully man at the same time. That is the only time in the history of the world that has ever happened. So it wouldn't be possible for Jesus to have any full brothers. But after Jesus was born, his parents went on to have more kids. In fact, later on in his life, when Jesus returned to his hometown, the people where he grew up said this: "What are these remarkable miracles he is performing? Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" (Mark 6:2-3). So Jesus had these four half-brothers, and at least two sisters, maybe more, but their names aren't recorded for us. And this brother James is likely the oldest after Jesus, as his name comes first in the order, and he's the one who wrote the book we are getting ready to study.

Something else you need to know about James is that he didn't always believe in Jesus. He always knew that his brother was real. He never doubted his *existence*. But he certainly didn't

believe that his brother was the Messiah, the Son of God, the savior of the world. Can you imagine what it would have been like growing up in Jesus' shadow? Sure, Jesus never put him in a headlock and pushed him through a wall, but how many times do you think James heard someone say, "Why can't you just be more like your brother? Why can't you pick up your room like Jesus? Why can't you get a 100% on every test like Jesus? Why can't you honor your mother and father like Jesus?" It was probably a little suffocating...and by the time they got older, when they grew up and became men, James wasn't having it anymore. After Jesus left their hometown and started performing miracles and appointing apostles and making it clear that he believed he was the Messiah, this is what we read in Mark 3:21: "When his family heard about this, they went to take charge of him, for they said, 'He is out of his mind.'" His family, likely led by James, the oldest brother, wanted to take him home, put him in a room, and lock the door. He's gone mad! Put him in a strait jacket! Get him some meds. He's a danger to himself, a distraction to society, and an embarrassment to our family. And now he's pulling other people into his delusion. And this sort of hostility toward Jesus wasn't just at the beginning of his ministry, it was after two full years of performing miracles and teaching that we are told in John 7:5, "Even his own brothers did not believe in him." So that's who James was: the half-brother of Jesus. And though he knew him well, almost as well as anyone alive, he was an extreme skeptic who tried to shut down his ministry!

That's what we know about his early life, and all of that comes from the Bible. But we also know about the end of his life, as it is written about by four different well-known historians from the ancient world - Josephus, Clement of Alexandria, Eusebius, and Hegesippus - who all write about James. They tell about a time in the early to mid 60's AD, about thirty years after Jesus died, when the leaders of Jerusalem tried to convince people to stop believing in Jesus. Who did they go to for help? None other than James himself, Jesus' half-brother! They brought him to the temple (I want you to be able to try to visualize this...this is what the temple looks like today, but if we could go back in time 2000 years ago, this is what you would see), and in front of tens of thousands of people, this is what they said to him - this is a quote from a historian named Hegesippus from the 2nd century AD - "Please! Persuade the people not to entertain erroneous opinions concerning Jesus: for all the people, and we also, listen to your persuasion. Go and stand upon the summit of the temple, so that from that elevated spot you may be clearly seen and heard by all the people." So the leaders are saying: "Listen up, you are about to hear for yourself from this man's mouth, from the half-brother of Jesus, the one who know him better than anyone who he really is." Listen to what that historian recounts next: "Much to the dismay of the Jewish leaders, James boldly testified that 'Christ himself is sitting in heaven, at the right hand of the God, and shall come on the clouds of heaven!'" Talk about their plan backfiring!

So how did they respond? The scribes and pharisees then said to themselves, "We have not done well in procuring this testimony to Jesus. But let us go up and throw him down, that the people may be afraid, and not believe Jesus." Let's go back to the picture of the ancient temple. That's where James gave this testimony, and they took him to this corner, and threw him off! That's a seventy foot drop. But he didn't die right away! So they picked up stones and hurled them at him, and one man took a rod and struck him in the head. The last words anyone heard him say: "I beg you, Lord God our Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." He repeated the very words of Christ himself on the cross.

Now here's the question: what happened? What took this man from being a clear and outspoken opponent to Jesus' ministry, someone who did not believe in him and thought he was out of his mind, to being someone who believed Jesus was the Christ, told others that his brother was the Christ and gave his life for that testimony? The answer is found in 1 Corinthians 15:3-7: "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James." Did you see that? After Jesus rose from the dead, he not only appeared to all of his disciples who believed in him, and to a large gathering of several hundred people, but he also appeared to James. And in that moment, he was awakened to faith. Jesus became real to him. And the brother who never believed in him, the brother who thought he had lost his mind and wanted to put him in a strait jacket, became the brother who actually who believed in Jesus, who became one of the most influential leaders in the early church, and who gave his life for his faith.

An incredible transformation takes place in a person's life when they become awakened to the reality of who Jesus really is and all he has done. That's not only true for James, that is true for all of us! In that moment, God goes from being a concept, an idea, or a distant deity to becoming real, up close and personal. This week, I asked a number of people at this church what change took place in their life when Jesus became real to them, listen to what they had to say:

- When Jesus became real to me it helped me cope with my past, redefined my present, and filled me with hope for the future. It changed my outlook on life, the language I used, even my friends and community.
- When Jesus became real to me I found rest, freedom, grace and love, instead of always feeling like I have to rely on myself, I could rely on him.
- When Jesus became real to me I found peace for the first time, I laid my fears and worries at his feet and no longer felt like I was carrying my burdens alone.
- When Jesus became real to me my desires changed. Instead of chasing worldly things for satisfaction, I found true fulfillment in him.
- When Jesus became real to me I surrendered. I realized life wasn't all about me. I realized my life was not my own, I was bound by both love and duty to serve Jesus with all that I am and with all that I have.

When Jesus becomes real to you, everything changes! That's what my friend Kami found out about a year and a half ago. Take a moment and listen to her story. (View the video recording of this sermon to watch this video.)

I have loved watching the way God is working in Kami's life. When Jesus becomes real, so many things change. And maybe that's the place you are right now. Life hasn't been working out the way you had planned. When you look inside, you're not the sort of person you hoped to be. Maybe it's time for you, just like Kami, to call out to God, to surrender to him, and see first-hand all the ways that following Jesus will change your life.

And I want to focus on one specific change following Jesus will make in our lives. So let's open

up to the very first verse in the book of James. James 1:1, “James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes, scattered among the nations: Greetings.” There are two words I want to highlight for you in this verse: *servant* and *Lord*. Though there are so many changes that take place in a person’s life when they become awakened to the reality of God, and here’s what I want to say - it’s my entire sermon in a sentence: When Jesus becomes real to you, you will become a servant to him. When Jesus becomes real to you, you will become a servant to him. Let’s say that together. That was James’ story. As soon as he realized who Jesus really was, he no longer wanted to live for himself, he no longer wanted to chase his dreams, his goals, or his ambitions. From that point on, everything revolved around serving Jesus. The word servant in the Greek comes from the word *doulos*. Here’s the definition:

- *A slave.*
- *One who is devoted to another to the disregard of their own interest.*
- *One who gives themselves up to advance the cause of Christ.*

This is the sort of servant, of *doulos*, James was claiming to be. Not just a butler who was willing to do tasks for roughly 40 hours a week in exchange for a salary. No! He said: “I am a slave of Jesus. I am devoted to him to the disregard of my own interests, I am giving myself up in order to advance the cause of Christ.” When he realized Jesus had risen from the dead, when Jesus became real to him, that was the only decision that made sense.

That was the case for a man named Saul. He was actively opposed to Jesus. He was arresting and killing followers of Jesus. But then, just like James, Jesus appeared to him, he was awakened to faith, and when Jesus became real to Saul, Saul became a servant to Jesus. Look at how he begins his letters to the Romans, the Philippians and to Titus: Romans 1:1, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus.” Philippians 1:1, “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus.” Titus 1:1, “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ.”

When Jesus becomes real to you, you become a servant to him. Just last week I had the privilege of going down to the Bonner Center on the Near East side of town. I had the privilege of connecting with leaders of the community center and the principle of the local elementary school, and I got to watch as about a dozen volunteers from The Creek spent a couple hours building boxes, unloading about a thousand pounds of food off a truck, distribute that food into all the boxes, and then families from the neighborhood drove up as each one was given about 30 pounds of food for the week. The leaders from the community center and the school thanked me again and again for the work that the people from the Creek do, week in and week out, to invest into the lives of students and families in that neighborhood. I was so proud of our church, people rolling up their sleeves to serve. Why? Because when Jesus becomes real to you, you become a servant to him.

I want to thank you for your heart to serve. When I mentioned a few weeks back that we had to turn some families away from our children’s ministry because we didn’t have enough adult leaders, and we needed some more help, especially at Easter, so many of you responded. I know one woman who served in our kids ministry in all four services. I got choked up hearing about that. What a beautiful servant’s heart! That’s the heart of someone who Jesus has become real to. Last week I talked to a woman who told me she had been attending here for 17 years. Last week

was her first week serving, and she said she wanted to stick with it. I love her openness and her heart, her willingness to engage and be used. I talked to another man who was widowed last year...he was sitting with a family in his life group who has loved him so faithfully through the most difficult journey of his life. And he said: "I still get to worship with my family today," as he motioned to his life group.

It is so inspiring, so beautiful to see people who are followers of Jesus who are serving in Jesus' name. And I want to take just a moment and speak to leaders in the room. Husbands who are leaders in your marriage. Fathers who are leaders of your household. Managers, team leaders, executives, company owners...one of the most important things for the people who are under your influence to see when they look at your life, whether it is your spouse, your children, or your employees, is the heart of a servant. More than they need bold and courageous leadership, more than they need inspirational motivation, more than they need coaching and feedback, they need to see in your heart and in your lifestyle the unmistakable conviction: "I am here to serve." You show me a leader who has the heart and lifestyle of a servant, and I'll show you a family, a team, a company, a church that is united, strong, and prepared to accomplish great things.

When Jesus became real to James, James became a servant to Jesus. In the rest of his book, which we are going to study for the next 7 weeks, we are going to see all the ways that following Jesus changes our lives. Does anyone want to venture a guess how many verses there are in James? 108. (There are several staff members who have committed to trying their best, this spring and summer to memorizing all of them, and we would love to have you join us on that challenge if you'd like.). Of those 108 verses, how many commands do you think James gives? 59! More than half of his verses are imperatives, instructions, and assignments. When Jesus becomes real to us, we become servants to him. And do you know how to tell if you really have the posture of a servant toward Jesus? It's when, no matter what he calls you to or asks of you, your default position is to say: "Yes, Lord! Of course. Your wish is my command."

Invitation: Why do followers of Jesus become servants? One of the reasons is because Jesus became a servant to us. The Bible says that though Jesus was in very nature God, he did not consider equality with God something to be held on to and used for his own advantage, but he became a human, and took the very *nature* of a servant...serving isn't just something Jesus did, a servant is who he *became*. He served us to the point of dying in our place on the cross. And maybe for you, today is the day that Jesus becomes real to you, you receive the gift of his sacrifice, you place your faith in his resurrection from the dead, you let him become the leader of your life, and you say, from this point on, I am going to be his servant!