

Message from Pastor J.T.

October 21, 2026

Hello friends!

I did not grow up with brothers. I have one sister who is younger than me by three years - and frankly, she adored me for no discernible reason at all. She continues to be a gift to me as a sibling. Perhaps it was our age difference, perhaps it was our gender difference, but there was no rivalry between us. No constant bickering or fighting. No "Mom! Tell Casey to leave me and my friends alone!" vibe. I mean, there were the times I hit her in the chest with a hammer (blunt end, not claw), and the time I rocked over her in a rocking chair - but those were accidents, man! The worst of it was probably when I was a senior in high school, and she a freshman. After being a bus-rider for 13 years (I believe "cheese-wagon jockey" is the preferred nomenclature), I finally had my own crappy car and could drive myself to school. Naturally - my little sister expected that she would also benefit from my station in life. However, like all the worst people in the world, I decided that nobody but me would benefit from my privilege. I declared that she could ride the bus just like I did until she got her own car - she wasn't riding with me. It was cruel, it was un-generous, and it probably developed a character in her that she appreciates today. She can thank me later.

All that being said - I'm thankful that I did not grow up with male siblings. As the father of two boys, I feel like it can only make your life worse - and I mean that in the most proud, loving, exhausted, exasperated way. Ever notice how many stories in scripture are about a man who has two sons? For starters, Adam - the first man - had two sons. One of them famously killed the other, but I'm sure that's not a statement about the inevitability of sibling rivalry, right? Abraham had two sons, despite what you may have sung at VBS. Abraham's son Isaac had two sons - twins, actually - Jacob and Esau. Jacob actually had 12 sons, but when it came time to divide their inheritance between them, he took his son Joseph's two sons (Ephraim and Menasseh) and included them in place of their father, effectively giving him a double share! According to the book of Acts, Moses actually had 2 sons. I bet you've never heard of them! 1 Chronicles 23:14-15, and Acts 7:29 mention Moses's sons Gershom and Eliezer, two boys with big shoes to fill who are never heard from again.

Jesus himself is recorded telling at least 2 stories about a man with 2 sons. One of them, *The Parable of the Two Sons*, we read a couple of weeks ago as part of our lectionary texts. Can you think of the other one? That's right - *The Parable of the Prodigal (or Lost) Son* from Luke 15.

Of course, Jesus might have been lucky to grow up with just one brother. The gospels record him having as many as FOUR brothers - James, Joseph (or Joses), Simon, and Judas (Jude). Yikes! Not only that, he had an undetermined number of sisters as well! In the same passage that names his brothers (Matthew 13:54-58) someone asks, "Are not *all his sisters* with us?" Sounds like he had at least two, and possibly a whole bunch of sisters!

Famously, one of Jesus's brothers doubted all of his claims, and was skeptical of his divinity while he was alive. Can you imagine? Not only is this guy your older brother - people are saying he can do no wrong, that he performs miracles, and that he might actually be the son of God? This may have been the most difficult sibling relationship of all time! I've always said that the

hardest place to be a Christian is at home among those who know you best. Jesus's brother James seems to have found that to be truer than any of us. He was decidedly NOT a believer.

After the Jesus was executed by the Empire, James was among those gathered to pray in the upper room with the remaining disciples. Jesus's resurrection appearance that day completely transformed him. He quickly rose to prominence as a pillar of the Jerusalem church, becoming its primary leader in the years after Jesus's ascension. He was so influential, in fact, that he presided over what is known as the Jerusalem Council (AD 48-50) where it was decided that gentile converts did not need to become Jewish first, keep kosher, or undergo circumcision in order to be saved. Kind of a big deal. He's also believed by many to be the author of the book of James in our New Testament - one of my favorite books. James was a straight talker.

It's hard to grow up with siblings. It's even harder if one of them claims to be God's son. It's probably the hardest if it turns out they're actually right. But just because James spent a lifetime making a mistake didn't mean he had to keep on making it once he knew better. He died having received the moniker "James the Just" because he was known for strict devotion to Jewish law, his deep piety, and his ascetic way of life. He was martyred in AD 62 by decree of the High Priest Ananus ben Ananus (WHAT A NAME!), at a time when there was no appointed Roman governor. The outrage and backlash from his martyrdom (even among the Jewish leaders, like the Pharisees) made its way to King Agrippa II and the incoming Roman governor, resulting in Ananus being stripped of his priesthood after only three months.

The church celebrates the feast day of James the Just of Jerusalem on this Friday, October 23rd, 2026. In honor of him, let's intentionally seek opportunities for justice in our world. Let's also remember to be generous to those who are lingering around the edges of faith, and not seek to impose our own piety upon them, just because it is important to us (remember the Jerusalem Council?)

Grace + Peace,
Pastor J.T.