

Kiama Anglican Church
Christ Church Kiama with St. Paul's Minnamurra

JAMES

FAITHFUL SERVICE is....

Wise Words from the Brother of Jesus.

LEADER'S

NOTES

Part 1

JAMES: FAITHFUL SERVICE is

STUDIES 1-6

Bible Studies : Term 3/4 : 2011 :

JAMES:

FAITHFUL SERVICE is ...

Wise Words from the Brother of Jesus.

The prophet Haggai, whose prophecy we studied just recently, in more than one place, challenged the People of Israel in post-exilic Jerusalem to ‘give careful thought to their ways’. James, whose letter sits near the end of the New Testament, likewise, without using the phrase, challenges us as Christians to ‘give careful thought to our ways.’

James wants his mostly Jewish Christian readers not to only have faith in Jesus but to live that out in every aspect of their lives. This, to James, is working out the salvation that they have through God’s grace.

From how to speak and how to use ‘riches’ to trials and temptations, to prayer and encouragement of one another James exhorts his Christian brethren to be wise, to be single minded, to be ‘doers of the word

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and not hearers only.'

As we study this text it is my prayer that we will all be challenged to look carefully at our lives and to seek to become more godly in all that we do.

Greg Holmes - September 2011

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THE STUDIES

Study Date*	Topic	Passage	Page No
1	Sept 11	Enduring	James 1:1-12 5
2	Sept 18	Hearing	James 1:13-27 7
3	Sept 25	Relating	James 2:1-13 9
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11	Nov 20	Living	James 1-5 25

**This is the Sunday the passage is first preached on (at 8:00 and 10:00). It is preached on the following Sunday at St. Pauls and Sunday@6.*

References:

- Blomberg, C.L. & Kamell, M.J. James (Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament) (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2008). Cited as B & K
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- Dickson, J & Smart, S. Vital Signs : The Wisdom of James for a Life of Faith (Sydney South, Aquila, 2006). Cited as D&S
- Moo, D.J. JAMES (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) (IVP, Leicester, 1985).
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- Nystrom, D.P. The NIV Application Commentary : JAMES (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1997).

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THE SECTIONS OF THE STUDIES

Read the Bible

It is good to read the passage for the week at the start of each study. Each of the passages in James are relatively short so reading them aloud is worthwhile.

It may actually be possible to read all of James up to the study each week. This would be helpful for understanding the flow of James' letter.

Discuss

The following three sections are the study proper. They are for the group meeting. As the leader you need to make some choices about which ones to do and how much time to spend on each.

Explore the Basics

These look at the basic ideas in the passage. I would recommend that each week you do these.

Deeper and Wider

As the heading suggests these dig deeper into the themes of the passage or look more widely at Scripture. It is probably among these that you as leader need to make some choices. Of course if you decide to have a go at them all I am sure it will be worthwhile.

Apply

These Questions should be done each week or at least you should work hard in your group each week to APPLY the lessons learnt to daily, everyday, hard slog, living in our world.

James' world was very different to ours and their social, political and religions structures quite different. In these studies we need to understand the original meaning then dig into that to see the crossover points and then apply this 1st Century AD material to our 21st Century AD world through the lens of our salvation through Jesus Christ.

We need to make the rubber of the 'idea' hit the road of our lives, thoughts and actions. - One of the problems in writing 'application' type questions is not knowing where all the individuals in groups etc. are up to. If you, as the group leader, can see a better application of the material - DO IT. - The important thing is to relevantly apply what we are talking about to our lives.

For next week : This is the passage for next week.

Please note that my answers below are not the 'correct' answers or what you are trying to get to in the study. I have set them out as a guide to my thinking only and an assistance to you.

*These Leaders Notes are meant to be the start of the assistance I am willing to give in regard to the studies. If you need anything further DO NOT hesitate to contact me.
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Some Introductory Thoughts.

From Dickson and Smart:

According to the unanimous testimony of the early church, the 'James' referred to in James 1:1 was none other than the second son of Mary. James and Jesus were brothers. If this is a new idea for you, look up Mark 6:3; 1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19 and 2:9-12).

From Blomberg and Kammell:

With this short letter, ... we have what is probably the first NT document written and the first existing Christian writing of any kind of which we know. James, the (half-)brother of the Lord Jesus and chief elder in Jerusalem during the first generation of Christianity (or at least from about AD 44 – 62), is writing to a group of primarily Jewish-Christian congregations, most likely in the mid-to-late forties, and probably somewhere in or around Syria. We have no indication as to where James himself resided at this time, but Jerusalem is obviously the best guess. James's letter thus joins the early chapters of Acts as a unique canonical witness, and the lone firsthand testimony, to very early Jewish Christianity. In short, these are our roots!

Suffice it for now to say that faith in action, especially in social action, remains central for this author. Like the OT prophets and as with Jesus, James sees no tension between (and indeed wedded closely together) orthodoxy and orthopraxy — correct belief and correct behavior. A personal relationship with Jesus and the quest for social justice do not create the competing understandings of Christianity that church history has often made them appear. Both remain absolutely essential to the gospel.

From Motyer

James' practical letter finds its focus in one set of topics: it is a letter about relationships. He calls us, for example, to care for orphans and widows (1:27), to be impartial in our courtesy and care of others (2:1); he emphasizes the duty of love for our neighbour (2:8), speaking of it as 'the royal law'; he scorns a profession of faith which fails in love and compassion (2:15–16) and applauds the life that risks itself for the sake of those who are at risk (2:25); he warns against feelings which imperil fellowship (3:14) and words which denigrate a brother (4:11); we are to discharge our honourable debts (5:4), guard our reactions (5:9), minister to the sick (5:14), share with the distressed (5:16) and urgently pursue those who stray from Christ (5:19–20). His letter is quite a catalogue, quite a sustained emphasis on this single set of topics.

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Study 1: JAMES 1:1-11

ENDURING

Day	Reading	My Thoughts	Prayer Points
1	James 1:1-11		
2	Matthew 5:1-10		
3	Proverbs 1:1-7		
4	Matthew 7:7-12		
5	Read all of James.		

The readings here take us through James and in parallel we read through the Sermon on the Mount (We will also be reading this in the Bible Readings in Church).

The other readings relate to the ideas in James we are looking at often from the book of Proverbs and from the teachings of Jesus.

The suggestion to read all James each week is to remind us that this is the way those first readers/hearers of James would have received the letter. You can hear it read through www.biblegateway.com and then go to Audio Bibles in the menu on the left hand side.

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Study 1: JAMES 1:1-11

ENDURING

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully together.

1. **Who writes this letter? How does he describe himself? To whom is the letter written?**

James writes this letter.

He calls himself a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

B&K: *““Slave” (rather than ‘servant’) preserves the sense of the Greek word here themselves to Jesus as their absolute divine master just as actual slaves had to swear unconditional allegiance to their human masters”*

Worth noting : (Motyer) – *“We have become accustomed to the standard English translation, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. But the Greek could equally well sustain the rendering ‘a servant of Jesus Christ who is God and Lord’”*

There is good evidence for the fact that this James was James the half brother of Jesus.

The letter is written to ‘the twelve tribes scattered among the nations.

D&S: *“The first Christians didn’t think of themselves as ‘Christians’. They were simply members of Israel who know their Messiah had come. What we call Christianity is really just the fulfilment of the hopes and longings of biblical Israel. The phrase ‘twelve tribes’ underlines this.”* But note Ephesians 2:19

This probably means that the letter is mainly for Jewish Christians of the so called dispersion. People who had come to follow Jesus Christ who were of Jewish background who for one reason or another lived in various places around the Roman Empire – and perhaps even beyond.

2. **Consider v2-5. What is the point of trials?**

Trials are forward looking and personal.

Forward looking because they are able bring

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about effects beyond the trial itself.

Personal because it produces personal effects in us – Trials produce perseverance which produces maturity.

Motyer: *Ask James, 'Does the road wind up-hill all the way?' and hear him reply, 'Yes, to the very end.'*

And in James (as with the rest of the New Testament) it is the end – the glorious hope we await – when Jesus returns that makes the trials both significant and worthwhile.

B&K: *"Thus James commands them to "let endurance have its complete effect" (v. 4). At times, it seems that God allows his people to get perilously close to the brink of destruction, but he never pushes them over the edge (cf. 2Co 4:8 – 12). Indeed, when they rely on him to preserve them, they grow, mature, and come out the other side of the trials stronger and more whole, character traits our world desperately seeks but desires to gain without the suffering that is usually required to obtain them."*

D&S: *"... if above everything else, we want to become total Christians, lacking nothing of Christ's blessings, then, despite the pain and sadness of our troubles, we will be able to find joy in the knowledge that God can and will use our circumstances to make us everything he wants us to be."*

3. v6. Where should we expect to get wisdom? What is it?

We get wisdom by asking God for it.

Wisdom is in many ways Godly common sense of "Godly Living in the World".

In the OT scriptures we are told again and again that it begins with the Fear of the Lord. (see Job 28:28; Psalms 111:10; Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 15:33)

Motyer: *"In conformity with his practical approach to things, there is a beautiful directness and simplicity about the teaching of James: whoever lacks wisdom can ask for it, and God will give it. Just like that! Such simplicity is either totally unrealistic, or else finds its justification in what is known about*

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God. For James, it is the latter. His doctrine of God is such that he can afford to make large promises in his name, and to affirm that those promises will be honoured.”

B&K “James’s use of “wisdom” (v. 5) gives the lie to so many worldly definitions of the concept, both ancient and modern. Not a mere intelligence quotient, accumulation of knowledge, critical acumen, practical expertise, or life experience, wisdom from a biblical perspective begins with following the God who has now revealed himself in Jesus Christ. It then proceeds with godly living. A person who does these things is truly wise, whether any of the commonly held attributes of wisdom are present or not. Conversely, the smartest, most skillful and critically honed person who rejects the Lordship of Jesus cannot be said to be wise in the fullest sense of the word.”

D&S: “Christians must value godliness over cleverness, compassion over knowledge, generosity of financial nous and justice of intellectual achievement. That is what it means to be wise.”

4. What do vs9-11 have to say to us about our ‘circumstances’?

Notice that there is a word here both to the rich and the poor. Their circumstances and responsibilities receive lots of attention in this letter.

It is saying that humility is a key – another theme of the letter.

We of course need to note that our ‘circumstances’ place us firmly among the rich – there are strong warnings in this letter for us.

Deeper and Wider

1. Read v2 again. Is he serious? How can we consider trials ‘pure joy.’

This sort of statement is indeed counter intuitive. Joy and trials do not seem naturally to go together.

But as we saw above trials have a positive

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purpose in the purposes of God.

Motyer: *“And it is for this reason that our settled conviction must be to appraise it as all joy, not because it is joyful in itself (for ‘all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant’ (Heb. 12:11) when it is in full flood), but because ‘later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness’ (Heb. 12:11). In James’ words, it is the only way forward to become perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.”*

And Joy is not momentary happiness but that deep down settled positive attitude that comes from knowing God through the saving grace of Jesus.

B&K *““Joy” in turn, speaks of a state of being rather than an emotion.¹³ Joy proves quite different from happiness, so that this verse does not support the idea that a Christian must smile all the time! Joy may be defined as a settled contentment in every situation or “an unnatural reaction of deep, steady and unadulterated thankful trust in God.”¹”*

Motyer: *“The road is, therefore, hard and long, and the task is unremitting: to endure the first onset of the startling, unexpected trial, and to endure again while it persists, and then to go on enduring. It is like the Lord Jesus who ‘endured the cross’ (Heb. 12:2) right through to the point where the whole work of salvation was accomplished, and he himself entered upon the unbroken possession of eternal glory at the Father’s right hand. We are thus called to a persistent endurance. But this hard road has a glorious destination for us too: that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing (4).”*

B&K: *“To begin with, James does not command us to wear the artificial “happy faces” that so many seem to think are required in church or other Christian circles. Denying one’s true emotions seldom accomplishes anything good. But while we cannot will ourselves to be jovial rather than depressed, we can choose how we think — hence the verbs about considering and knowing in vv. 2 – 3. The joy James has in mind “is an eschatological catchword, not an emotion. . . a theological perception of trials, which considers their complete demise by a God who promises a new day.””*

D&S: *“When we pray that God would make us more like Jesus, it shouldn’t surprise us if the process is at times*

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painful. If God is going to bump the edges of an imperfect image to make it 'complete', some serious restructuring is going to be needed"

2. What is v6-8 saying about doubt?

That it equates to being double minded (that is not single minded).

Doubt here is not the simply wondering about how could God possibly allow this or that, or how could God do something. This is a settled attitude that does not in fact believe that God is who he says he is.

D&D: *"Throughout the Bible the words 'believe' and 'doubt' aren't just intellectual terms: assenting to something verses questioning something. These terms are about the presence of absence of trust and devotions. To doubt God is to refuse to entrust yourself to him. ... If you take an each way be, partly devoted to God, partly devoted to the world, you shouldn't expect to get anything from the Lord."*

3. What is the problem with riches?

As mentioned there is a great deal on this topic in the letter.

The rich here, taken up by their riches, will fade away – will not stand in the judgement.

They are encouraged to humility and of course to single mindedness.

Motyer: *"The magnetism of riches is powerful and insistent, and we constantly need the wisdom of God to see through the facade. We do not have to be wealthy to desire money, and the desire is as threatening as the actuality (1 Tim. 6:9); we do not have to possess much in order to be snared by the delights of possession. But the Bible never teaches that wealth is wrong—did not the Lord give Solomon, as an intended blessing, riches as well as wisdom (1 Ki. 3:12–13)? Everything depends on how it has been acquired (e.g. Je. 17:11), how it is used (e.g. Lk. 12:19–20) and what place it holds in the heart of its possessor (e.g. 1 Jn. 2:15)."*

D&S: *"It is estimated that 1 billion people in the world live on less than a dollar a day."* and *"... regardless of our station in*

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life we must view our circumstances theologically, in terms of God's creation and redemption of us, not socially, in terms of our wealth or poverty."

4. Look at Matthew 7:7-12. How does what Jesus is promising here relate to James' words in v5-8

James bases his belief that God will give wisdom if we ask it on the very character of God 'who gives generously'. God is a giving God and he is a generous God.

Jesus is saying the same thing in Matthew.

Apply

1. We are all rich. What warning should we take from this passage?

In the world's terms all of us in Kiama are insanely rich.

The letter then help us greatly to consider the responsibilities, dangers and ethics of this.

Discuss this term as it applies in our community.

The true question is where is our 'heart'.

B&K: "Rich believers, which by global standards include almost everyone who has access to this book, must beware of taking pride in their possessions. How many of us have fallen so in love with this world that, if we knew we were to die tonight, we would experience genuine sorrow because of missed opportunities for various earthly pleasures? James does not teach that a person cannot be both rich and Christian, but he does suggest here that one's attitude to possessions proves crucial. Unless we recognize the utter transience of this life and the potential suddenness of its end, and unless we live each moment for Christ with a sense of urgency about redeeming the time (Eph 5:16), we risk tacitly worshipping the world."

2. Consider the idea of being 'double-minded'. Why is it a problem? What is the remedy?

The opposite of being double minded is to be single minded.

God wants us to focus only on life for him.

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Motyer :” double-minded, ‘dipsychos’, a word James may even have coined himself. He uses it again in 4:8. Literally, it means ‘two-souled’, ‘with divided soul’. We must put on one side our English usage ‘two-faced’, for James’ meaning is not that of duplicity. It is rather, as with his other word, to be in two minds: not two-faced, but facing both ways.”

The remedy is to pray for Wisdom.

In regard to ‘counting it all joy’ Motyer says :” James says we are to count it all joy, but do we ever do so? If we are to line ourselves up with Scripture a whole revolution in thinking is called for. And this revolution touches not only our appraisal of life’s experiences, but of our spiritual expectations also.”

For Next Week: Read James 1:12-27

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Study 2: JAMES 1:12-27

HEARING

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully together.

1. **Who is blessed (v12)? What is the result of perseverance?**

This picks up the idea of v2 again.

Motyer: *“The word blessed contains two strands of meaning. It means ‘happy’ in a fairly general sense in Acts 26:2 or Romans 14:22, but in the more [James, Page 48] particular sense of ‘fulfilled’ in cases like Luke 12:37. Along this line, blessed picks up James’ teaching in verses 2–4 that persistence through trial brings personal fulfilment and enrichment. In most cases of the word (makarios) in the New Testament, there is a plain hint, if not a clear assertion, of the activity of God in imparting blessing.”*

In fact this whole second section of Chapter one simply reiterates the themes from the first half.

Endurance and perseverance James now tells us work themselves out in eternal blessing.

Motyer: *“As Sophie Laws puts it, ‘the ideas of trial, probation and endurance’ are ‘now seen not in relation to the present perfecting of character, as in i. 2–4, but to the prospect of a future reward’. This brings in a whole new range of motivations on the call to endure.”*

Further it results in the ‘crown of life’

Motyer: *“But what attracts the reward is not their endurance, but the love for God which prompted it. The crown of life is his gift to those who love him. What a key truth for the whole of life!”*

2. **According to v18 where does our salvation come from? See John 3:5-7**

It comes from ‘new birth through the word of truth’

Notice that this is a vital part of God’s gifts to us. Notice that here in the opening Chapter of James is a clear reference to God’s grace. Salvation is a

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gift of God.

D&S: *“No matter how strong is James’ insistence of good works – and it is pretty strong – his starting point is grace: our spiritual birth is a gift brought about by God’s word.”*

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3. Consider v 19 and 26. What warning is there here for us?

This presents us with one of the important themes of James – that of our use of words. There are elements of this in v6 where we ‘ask’ faithfully.

We are all tempted in this area.

We are warned and advised in v19

And warned again in v26.

Of course one corrective is being ‘quick to listen’ – especially to the Word of God.

Being slow to speak will assist us as well in the matter of anger. There certainly are appropriate times to be angry and to stand for what is right – but being quick to listen and slow to speak will save us from much sinful and inappropriate anger.

Motyer: *“James does not call us to a silenced tongue, but to a bridled one. The picture is vivid—and realistic in the light of experience. There is a very special nexus between the tongue and the central forces of the personality. The tongue and the heart are linked so that the tongue is an accurate index of what we are at the core of our persons. Was James, we may ask, quietly recalling and accepting the words of the Lord Jesus: ‘How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks’ (Mt. 12:34).”*

B&K: *“Wrongful speech can come in the form of angry words or maligning another’s character, something sadly prevalent in church life in every era. Gossip, for example, does not merely annoy those who are maligned; it threatens the gossip’s spiritual health.”*

4. From vs18, 21-25, what does the ‘word’ do? And, what should we do with it?

The word first saves us then brings us into relationship with God (v18b).

Motyer: *“the connection between verses 19b–25 and what*

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has preceded is forged by the idea of the word of God: the word of truth (18) ... the implanted word (21) ... the word (22) ... the word (23) ... the perfect law, the law of liberty (25)."
In v21-25 this is worked out in obedience. The word is to have a positive effect on the lifestyle of the Christian.

One question of course is what is the 'word'. I take it that James means the Old Testament Scriptures as taught and fulfilled by Jesus.

We should obey the word. – That is we do what it says. Not simply treating it as a nice idea – or as in James' almost absurd example 'looking' at the word and then acting like we have forgotten what it says.

Motyer:

<i>"the man with the mirror</i>	<i>the believer with the word</i>
<i>observes (23–24)</i>	<i>(25) looks into</i>
<i>goes away (24)</i>	<i>(25) perseveres</i>
<i>forgets (24)</i>	<i>(25) acts</i>
<i>"</i>	

Again a theme throughout the book.

Motyer: *"We now come (with v. 18) to the heart of the matter. James' argument runs like this. A steady persistence is necessary if we are to make headway to maturity and life. Amongst other ways in which we are to show ourselves durable, there is the maintenance of a heart of love to God (12). But this very heart is itself a central foe of righteousness, because of its contagious sinfulness (13–15). About this we must see to it that we are in no doubt (16). But there is a solution to our dilemma: from heaven we may expect absolutely every needed good thing, coming to us by divine gift (17). And in particular there is one thing God has freely chosen to do for us: he has brought us to birth by his word with the intention that we should be specially his, and notably holy (18)."*

D&S: *"... Advancing in our knowledge of God's word is not the goal of the Christian life: it is simply the means by which God strengthens us for the life of faith."*

Deeper and Wider

1. We all face temptation. What do vs 13-15 tell us about

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the nature and the result of temptation?

Nature:

First God is not the tempter Satan (though it is worth noting here that Satan is not mentioned) is and often enough the temptation comes from within ourselves.

(Notwithstanding that God is in total control)

Motyer: "First, God cannot be tempted with evil. The divine nature is of such unmixed holiness that it is impossible for him to be enticed to plot to harm us. There is nothing within his whole nature to which that or any other temptation could appeal, or which would respond to that or any other base suggestion. Secondly (and consequently) he himself tempts no one. He is of such unmixed goodness in his attitudes and actions that there is no room in motive, will or deed for that which would bring disaster, great or small, on any of his people. To be sure, he places tests in our pathway. Indeed, it is even possible to say that he never gives any gift without, at the same time, providing some test regarding our use of his bounty."

Temptation itself is not sin but the first step we take to yield (or even consider yielding) leads us down that rocky path.

Our desires are what begins the process, the next step is temptation to sin, then (if we give in) the sin and then that has one consequence death.

James' birth and growth metaphor is a striking image.

The result is 'death' – A stark contrast to the 'crown of life' of v12.

B&K: "This proves crucial in pastoral ministry: what one person finds as intense temptation another person may never experience as even a faint enticement, and vice-versa. Temptations are tailored to the individual, and so we as believers must never belittle a person for struggling with something we think of as inane. Instead, we must realize that

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each of us has particular battles nuanced specifically for us, and we need to give both grace and exhortation to one another to stand firm in times of testing. Conversely, we must always flee temptation, regardless of how "little" it may seem to us. These inner longings, James says, busily work to pull us away from our Lord."

And- "Centuries ago the Venerable Bede suggested that there were "three stages in temptation. The first is suggestion, the second is experiment, and the third is consent." Once we reach the consent stage, we have been carried away by sin, we have willingly left the path of righteousness, and we deserve to be separated from God."

D&S: "Much of the remainder of James' letter is a plea to resist taking the step from desire and temptation to sin and death."

2. The controversy about James' letter is that it is all about works and not about grace? How are both addressed in this passage?

Grace is present as the basis of salvation in v17-18

Our obedience is then demanded in v22ff

Motyer: *"The view taken in this present book is that disagreement between James and Paul is in fact artificially produced by wrenching James' words out of their context. Paul and James are no more in contradiction than are Articles 11 and 12 of the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England. Article 11 reads: 'We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith.' Article 12 reads: 'Good Works, which are the fruits of [James, Page 20] Faith ... are ... pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith.' Paul and James respectively could not be more succinctly expressed. To Paul the question was, 'How is salvation experienced?' and the answer, 'By faith alone.' To James the question was, 'How is this true and saving faith recognized?' and the answer, 'By its fruits.'"*

3. Discuss v16-18. What do we have to thank God for?

Simple everything – it all comes from God

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Especially our 'birth' – our salvation.

D&S: *“For James, then, the gifts from heaven are two-fold: new birth through God’s word and knowledge of how God wants us to live in his world (wisdom). In James’ thoughts these are two side of the same coin. We are reborn to walk in the paths of God.”*

4. In v27 we are told what ‘pure’ religion is. Is this all there is to it? What do you think James is saying?

James returns to two of his important themes here:

Care for the disadvantaged.

Purity of life.

(And there is a case to be made that you can add a third from v26 – Control of the tongue.)

These are not meant to be an exhaustive description of the Christian life (though I suspect we would find them hard enough) but examples of the outward and inward aspects of our walk with God.

Apply

1. The way we use words is an important theme in James. Discuss time when words have been helpful and when they have been hurtful?

For discussion.

It is important to note that James tells us to be ‘quick to listen’. This is a vital lesson for us all. Not the least in a Bible Study context. For certainly in this context James has listening carefully to the Word of God at least partly in mind.

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2. 'Doing' the word is an important thing for James. Do we adequately 'do' the word? (Be honest)

For discussion.

Note Motyer: *"Within the structure of James, then, 1:26–27 forms a most important transition: these two verses look back to the foundational verse of the whole book (1:18) and spell out in general terms how a real experience of new birth will display itself in a characteristic development of life. And, as we have seen, in doing this, verses 26–27 provide the 'chapter headings' for the rest of the letter: care, speech and holiness."*

For Next Week: Read James 2:1-13

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Study 3 JAMES 2:1-13

RELATING

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully together.

- 1. Read all of v1-13 carefully. What is this passage all about?**

The passage is essentially about our relationships.

Possible summed up in 'love your neighbour as yourself.'

One commentator says that the whole book is really about Christian relationships.

- 2. In v5-7 what is the contrast between the rich and the poor?**

Here the contrast is between Christian poor and the non-Christian rich who are exploiting them.

Right through James we need to be careful to understand when James is addressing the poor whether he is addressing non-Christians.

Here and in 5:1-6 it is non-Christians.

Here the non-Christian rich are exploiting and oppressing the poor.

Here the Christians James is writing to are characterised as generally being poor.

But note v5

- 3. What point is being made in v8-11?**

That this seemingly small point about favouritism is really serious for to break the law is to break the whole law and thus be a guilty sinner.

- 4. What provides the antidote to 'favouritism'?**

Being obedient to the royal law – loving your neighbour as yourself.

D&S: *“Once we have understood the glory of Christ, making*

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distinctions among ourselves based on wealth and status is not only absurd; it is a betrayal of Jesus and his gift of new life.”

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Deeper and Wider

1. Why do you think James starts this as he does in v1?

He is making the point of who his readers are.

They are those who have committed their lives to the Lord Jesus Christ.

So they should not behave in this way.

Motyer: *“What matters is that James deliberately introduces the idea of the glory of Jesus and compels us to ask why he does so. ... James teaches by a clear implication that in both status and judgment the Lord Jesus Christ, who is himself the Glory, must reign supreme. As to how we accept others, we must ask how he would accept them (cf. Rom. 14:1, 3; 15:7).”*

2. How does this passage reflect the teachings of Jesus? Consider Matthew 23:12, Luke 6:20, Mark 10:23; Luke 13:24; Matthew 5:19; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-37; Luke 18:9-14.

Jesus taught

Note - *Matthew 23:12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted. // James 4:10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.*

And of course the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) is an eloquent counter to the attitude in v2-4

And the Pharisee and the Tax Collector also (Luke 18:9-14)

The other passages are:

Luke 6:20 Looking at his disciples, he said: “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Mark 10:23 Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

Luke 13:24 “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.

Matthew 5:19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

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Matthew 22:34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

37 Jesus replied: “ ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

3. James refers to ‘the royal law’ (v8), ‘the whole law’ (v10) and ‘the law that gives freedom’ (v12). Is there a difference? What is it?

Quite clearly the royal law is the second great commandment.

I take it generally that when James refers to the Law he is referring to the OT scriptures as witnessed to and taught by Jesus and viewed through the lens of Jesus’ teaching.

Motyer on ‘royal law’: *“Here, then, is a law which comes to us with all the weight of scriptural authority, but which in particular is marked out as being a special concern of our King, something that is specially suited to him and which comes to us bearing the royal arms upon it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself.”*

And again on ‘the whole law’: *“The Lord expressed himself in his words; the law of God reveals the nature of God. The brilliance of the diamond is the perfection of the holy God himself: the whole diamond is the law; the individual facets are the commandments.”*

And again: *“James has so far taught us two truths about the command to love our neighbour as ourselves. First, because it is the royal law, the law that in a special sense belongs to the king, we would wish to obey it—simply because he would specially desire us to do so. Secondly, because it is a command of the law of God, we must obey it. To dismiss it is to dismiss the facet of the Glory of God which it represents; But, thirdly, it is part of the law of liberty, and therefore we can obey it.”*

B&K: *“Davids, therefore, asks if it is not “most natural to see*

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a reference to the whole law as interpreted and handed over to the church in the teaching of Jesus, i.e., the sovereign rule of God's kingdom (cf. Matthew 5)?"

4. What does it mean to show mercy?

To put mercy into all relationships and mercy is undeserved favour.

Note the close parallel here to Jesus' words

about forgiveness. *"Matthew 5:14 For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."*

B&K: *"Jesus' beatitude on showing mercy (Mt 5:7) may be in James's mind here, but the closest biblical parallels to the contrast in these two verses are found in the parable of the unforgiving servant (Mt 18:32 – 35) and in the Lord's Prayer (Mt 6:12, 14 – 15). If we absolutely refuse to show mercy to others, we demonstrate that we have never truly received God's mercy ourselves. When we pray for God's forgiveness, we declare that we are simultaneously forgiving those who have sinned against us. Proverbs 21:13 more specifically insists that those who close their ears to the cries of the poor will have their cries ignored by God."*

D&S: *"Human mercy is the proof of who God's people are. In this sense, mercy is able to 'boast/triumph/ over judgment."*

Motyer: *"Should not we too be those in whose every act mercy has the last laugh?"*

Apply

- 1. Can you think of a modern equivalent of the illustration/story in v2-3? In what ways might we be guilty of this sort of favouritism?**

For discussion

Motyer: *"James' illustration is timeless. It speaks as loudly today as when he penned it. It is still not always easy to know how to accommodate a tramp in a worship-service and it still is easy to assume that wealth gives a commanding voice in church affairs. The sin of partiality is the sin of judging by accidentals and externals and, as James noted, it always bears down on the poor and disadvantaged."*

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B&K: *“At least in James’s churches, the possibility of destitute people entering was real; in many middle- or upper-class suburban congregations they would never dare!”*

D&S: *“And, do we really think that a Datsun family dressed by Lowes would receive the same welcome in a (our) modern church as the BMW family dressed by Country Road?”*

2. From the passage, to whom should we be merciful? How can you practically do this this week?

To everyone – or if you like to go back to v8 – our neighbour.

B&K: *““Neighbor” thus embraces everyone, even enemies, just as Jesus taught (Lk 10:25 – 37), not merely those close to us relationally, financially, or religiously. James’s use of “yourself” does not promote modern psychologies (before they were invented!) that intentionally enjoin “self-love” before we can love others. Rather, the love commands throughout Scripture assume that people have a healthy, balanced view of self, rather than taking pathologies into account. Otherwise, we can become so wrapped up in trying to love ourselves and always feeling inadequate in doing so that we never turn to loving others.”*

For discussion

For general consideration of how James addresses the issue of the poor and the rich note Motyer’s words: *“If it is only the poor who are privileged to receive the divine choice, then the rich brother of 1:10 is a considerable embarrassment! So also are Abraham and Job, whom James quotes with approval (2:21–23; 5:11) and who were exceedingly wealthy men (Gn. 13:2; Jb. 1:3; 42:12). Furthermore, of course, the evidence of the rest of the Bible is by no means as unqualified as James’ words, taken at face value, seem. The wealthy Joseph of Arimathea (Mt. 27:57), the proconsul, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7–12), Levi the tax-collector (Lk. 5:27) and his colleague Zacchaeus (Lk. 19:2) are sufficient to prove that the Lord has no animus against the rich as such. At the same time, since we have to search out such men among the many we meet in the pages of the New Testament, surely Paul gets the balance right when he says that ‘not many ... powerful, not many ... of noble birth’ were chosen by God (1 Cor. 1:26). We see, then, from this evidence inside James and more widely in the Bible, that James has*

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learnt a teaching technique from the Lord Jesus himself. In some situations there are indeed two sides to the truth, but one so far outclasses the other that it merits stating as if it alone were the truth. This is what Jesus did when he affirmed that a real love for himself demanded hating our parents (Lk. 14:26). Does he really call us to hate our parents? Of course not! Yet in saying that the two loves are mutually exclusive he does no violence to the practical truth that our devotion to him, when it is real, is of necessity in a class by itself.

When we apply this formula to what James writes, we see that he is expressing a general rather than an invariable truth. The Lord does not choose only the poor; it is not only the rich who persecute believers and blaspheme the name of Jesus. Yet, in general, this is not only true but overwhelmingly true. The preponderance of the Lord's concern is shown for those who are towards the bottom of the world's heap."

For Next Week: Read James 2:14-26

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Study 4: JAMES 2:14-26

DOING

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully together.

1. **What is the main thrust of James' argument here?**

Essentially this passage is about the relationship between faith and deeds.

The question it asks is, "Is apparent faith which is not obedient to God's commands real faith at all?"

More on this in 'Deeper and Wider'.

Motyer: *"To arrive at a correct definition of faith, James introduces four illustrations: the ill-clad and hungry brother or sister Christian (15–17), the believing but troubled demons (18–20), Abraham, the friend of God (21–24), and Rahab who welcomed Joshua's spies (25–26). Before tackling these illustrations in detail, notice three things: first, each illustration ends with a summary statement of what James wants us to learn (17, 20, 24, 26). Secondly, the first two illustrations are negative (what faith is not); the second two are positive (what faith is). Thirdly, the first and last illustrations deal with the manward evidence of a true faith (hungry people fed; endangered spies received); the second and third illustrations deal with the godward evidence of a true faith (peace with God—not terror, and a life of obedience to God's will)."*

2. **What impact does the story in v15-16 have on you?**

Can you imagine anyone doing such a thing?

It seems appalling in so many ways.

The Peanuts cartoon included in the question booklet has always seemed an apt comment on this:

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While probably not quite as directly we are in danger of doing all these sorts of things. It is easy to dismiss this sort of thing as extreme and not think any further. The point is to make us think.

B&K: *“And this is what angers James: the more well-to-do believer does not take care of the physical needs of the other despite all their spoken good wishes.”*

3. **What point is v18-19 making?**

In v18 he basically repeats his point from v14 as a statement and then his seemingly radical example is that the demons believe in God thought that is not a saving belief.

The ‘one God’ may be a reference to the Hebrew

Shema see Deuteronomy 6:4 *Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.*

Motyer: *“This becomes very clear in the allusion to the demons, for demons are, as a matter of fact, unusually well placed to believe certain orthodox affirmations with all their hearts. James selects the truth that there is only one God.*

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Yet, holding this, they continue as demons; they are not saved; they know nothing of peace with God; and they do not love the only God whom they confess.”

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4. What two examples does James use of faith in action?

He turns to the Old Testament, Genesis and Joshua and speaks of Abraham and Rahab. More discussion on this one below.

Deeper and Wider

1. Discuss the issue of Paul's, 'By grace are you saved ... not by works,' (Ephesians 2:8-9 but note v10) and James, 'so faith without deeds is dead'?

Well! Where do we start?

James is not arguing that you can be saved by doing good works, (faith works if you like). It is arguing that true faith will issue in good works not as a grounds for salvation but as an outworking of true salvation which is by grace alone.

Motyer: *"James, of course, knows that he is being impish and provocative. This is what he intends. For behind his seemingly scandalous questioning about the truth of salvation by faith there lies his own clear teaching that faith is the primary thing, the hallmark of the Christian, the irreplaceable priority. The present chapter began by addressing my brethren as those who 'have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ'. It is the common characteristic of all Christians; it is the thing which binds them into a brotherhood. In verse 5, faith is the first way in which God enriches those whom he has chosen. Looking forward into the passage lying before us, verse 17 sees faith as 'having', i.e. possessing as part of its reality, works; in verse 20 faith is, as it were, a central core which should have works attached to it; in verse 22 faith is the dominant partner with works as its colleague. If we look right back to the beginning of the letter, 1:2-3 pictures life as an arena in which faith faces the tests of experience; and if we look on to the end, 5:15 teaches us about the prayer which proceeds from faith. It is undeniably true that if we snatch some phrases from their context in the present passage we can make James fall out with Paul—but then the error is ours in forcing a meaning*

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which the context disallows. But if we ask what place James accords to faith, then he and Paul are at one. Faith is God's foundational gift (Jas. 2:5; Eph. 2:8). It is the common mark of all Christians (Jas. 2:1; Gal. 3:26). It is the continuing reality, running like a story-line through all the length and all the experiences of Christian life (Jas. 2:22; 1 Tim. 6:12). It is the root from which good works (Jas. 2:22; Tit. 3:8) grow."

B&K: "'Works" here are not the Pauline "works of the law,"s such as circumcision, but rather the works of love, such as caring for those who are in need, not showing favoritism, being humble, or being slow to speak. In essence, works are the sum total of a changed life brought about by faith. Where "Paul denies the need for 'pre-conversion works,' " James emphasizes the absolute necessity of post-conversion works."

B&K: "as Frances Gench nicely phrases it, "Paul is dealing with obstetrics, with how new life begins; James, however, is dealing with pediatrics and geriatrics, with how Christian life grows and matures and ages.'"

2. What do demons do when they recall that 'there is one God'?

They tremble.

As should all those who are not in right relationship with Him, who persist in their rebellion.

Believing in God and having a saving faith are very different things. This is the point James is making. Faith comes by grace and results in a changed relationship to God and a new obedience to Him.

3. Abraham and Rahab! Discuss the type of example that each provides?

James refers to these believers' 'textbook' – The Old Testament.

Looking at Abraham, the father of the nation, he takes one obedient act of Abraham – his willingness to sacrifice Isaac and uses that to

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show that Abraham's faith was active. Genesis 15:6; Genesis 22).

Motyer: *"To the human eye, the episode of Hagar and Ishmael (Gn. 16) would make one wonder: Abram is not now really trusting God and the promises, is he? Has he not abandoned faith for his own ability to have a son? But wait, what's this? An altar, knife and fire, the precious Isaac, a victim—and, by a clear implication of what we heard him say to his servants, there is an expectation that God would reconstitute the burnt body and restore the boy to life. This is indeed faith!"*

Rahab, on the other hand, is not such an obvious choice. She was a gentile, a prostitute, and, to be blunt, a traitor to her own race. Her 'act' was to hide the Israelite spies when they were in Jericho. (Joshua 2)

Motyer: *"Rahab's sort of faith, ... puts all life under contribution: her house, her resources, her ingenuity and her personal safety."*

B&K: *"This seems to contradict texts like Ro 4:2 – 4 and Gal 3:6, until we realize that Paul used Abraham as an example of faith providing initial justification, while James uses this example to refer to final, eschatological justification. Thus James shows that Abraham was able to prove his faith as real because he was willing to act on it, so that he was brought to salvation at the end"*

4. So, what is the answer to James' question in v14?

You could do worse than take v26 as the answer. Or simply say NO (Because a 'faith' that does not issue in deeds is not really truly a faith at all.

D&S: *"Faith in Jesus Christ will always involve doing good works, not because two things save you (faith and works), but simply because faith is trusting the One who called us to love our neighbour as ourselves."*

Apply

1. How is your faith demonstrated by your actions? Talk about what you have done this week.

There is an old illustration which asks the question, "If being a Christian was made illegal

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tomorrow would there be enough evidence to convict you?"

For discussion.

2. What practical and physical thing can you do for a brother or sister in need this week?

For serious discussion and action.

D&S: *"If we can afford to buy CDs, go to restaurants, go away for holidays, attend the theatre and so on, we can afford to give equal portions to the poor. What else could loving our neighbours as ourselves mean in monetary terms."*

Motyer: *"Whatever would James say to the situation we are in today? The ease with which information circles our globe and the way in which the media bring all life into our lives sets before us not a brother or sister ... ill-clad and in lack of daily food, but thousands upon thousands of them (if we confine ourselves to our relatives in the Lord's family) and doubtless millions (if we think of the family of man). The presence of this need is the touchstone as to whether our faith is alive or dead. James is only echoing the Lord Jesus: we cannot claim a valid and eternally significant relationship with him if we sit loose to the needs of 'one of the least of these' (Mt. 25:45). If our faith is living, it will be seen in the pressure we try to exert on those agencies which have it in their power to meet the needs of the whole world virtually at a stroke.*

We should be relentless in pushing governments—and pushing church leaders who have the opportunity to address world-governments in a significant way—to throw both economic and military caution to the winds in the face of the prior claims of human need. Meat mountains, butter mountains and powdered milk mountains are an offence to God and man if there is a hungry mouth in the world that can be filled through them."

AND: *"Spurgeon is credited with the view that 'If you want to give a hungry man a tract, wrap it up in a sandwich'. With great respect, he might better have said, 'If you want to give a hungry man a sandwich, wrap it up in a tract.' For the eye of faith sees forward into the endless reaches of eternity, and is aware that the need to be right with God far outstrips the need for earthly amelioration. Plainly our giving must have*

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‘the cause of the gospel’ in this narrower sense well to the fore. But we are rarely caught by this dichotomy; the limitations on our giving are those imposed by our own cramped affections and concerns.”

For Next Week: Read James 3:1-12

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Study 5: JAMES 3:1-12

SPEAKING

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully together.

1. What is the main thrust of this passage?

Be very careful how you speak.

Indeed the whole of chapter 3 has as its theme the use of words.

Motyer: *“It comes as no surprise to us that James takes a serious view of the tongue. It arises from the particular way in which he stated the doctrine of salvation. Our heavenly Father made us his children by the powerful word he addressed to us, ‘the word of truth’ (1:18). His children should be marked out by their careful, controlled speech (1:26).”*

D&S: *“The logic of James is simple: the word has been ‘planted’ in us (1:21); now the fruit of that word must be seen growing in our lives and on our tongues. We are to love God and our neighbours with our words.”*

2. What positives about speech are there in v2b-4,9a?

Speech, well controlled, can indeed turn things for good (or bad).

James is not calling for silence or he would not have written this letter. He is calling for care and self-control.

Speech can produce teaching, self control, set right directions, praise God.

Motyer: *“Sin remains our universal experience and it takes all sorts of forms. Among them, as every self-aware believer will admit, sins of speech are prominent—the hasty word, the untruthful statement, the sly suggestion, harmful gossip, innuendo, impurity. Indeed, not to [James, Page 120] sin in speech would demand perfection, and we would be unrealistic not to see James’ thoughts going back as he voices this thought to a thirty-year experience, within his own home, of one who ‘committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips’ (1 Pet. 2:22). Yet James’ purpose in this section of*

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his letter is not to warn us to be on our guard against the hasty or impure or lying tongue—or whatever our weakness may be—but to make the positive point that control of the tongue leads to a master-control of ourselves and our lives.”

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3. What negative things are said about speech in v5-6?

Probably need to read on to v8 here.

Well : - They are not hard to find in these verses. The tongue boasts, it is 'a world of evil', corrupts, has a negative influence on life,

"It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison"

I am not sure if there is an intended connection but this last phrase does put one in mind of a snake and hence of the Garden of Eden.

In Australia we can easily identify with the picture at the end of v5.

B&K: *"The rotten fruit of an untamed tongue include gossiping, belittling, cursing, bragging, manipulating, false teaching, exaggerating, complaining, flattering and lying."* Stulac astutely observes: *Spread gossip, and people will not trust you. Speak with sarcasm and insults, and people will not follow you. Yet what is especially on James's mind is not the reaction of others to your speech but the spreading of sin from your speech to the rest of your life. Be hateful with your tongue, and you will be hateful with other aspects of your behavior. If you do not discipline and purify your speech, you will not discipline or purify the rest of your life."*

4. What are v9-12 saying about the way we speak?

It is saying we can do both bad and good with our words.

We use the same faculties to praise God and the 'curse men'. James points out the incongruity of this.

This reflects the 'double-mindedness' of chapter 1.

Motyer: *"The repeated words 'with it' ... underline the use of the same faculty for two opposite, irreconcilable purposes, to bless and to curse. Not only so, but our inconsistency is further compounded by the fact that we bless and curse the same thing, the image of God."*

Motyer again: *"This is James' sixth reason for keeping a watchful eye on our speech. A fig must have a fig tree as its*

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source, a grape can come only from a vine, an olive from an olive tree; salt water has a salt source; sweet water a sweet source; bitter words a bitter heart; critical words a critical spirit; defamatory, unloving speech issues from a heart where the love of Jesus is a stranger.”

B&K: “James’s point is that people can either control their tongues or let their tongues control them..... The tongue legitimately claims substantial power. But, as Davids remarks, “it is not that the tongue steers the ship, but that the proper helmsman is often not in control.”

Deeper and Wider

1. What does v1 saying about being a teacher?

Don’t – well not quite.

He reminds his readers of the great responsibility of being a teacher and the great accountability.

By teacher, I take it here, James means a leader in the church who teaches the things of God.

Being a teacher is indeed a ‘tongue’ activity which leads James to the rest of the passage.

Which of course all applies to teachers most significantly but also to all of us.

D&S: “The modern teacher is till charged with helping other believers see with clarity what the apostles said about Jesus and laid down for the churches. Exaggerations, omissions and hobbyhorses are not permitted. Whether through the public ‘sermon’, the small group Bible study or the Sunday school class, teachers are meant to be a kind of window into ‘the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints’ (Jude 3).”

2. Read Matthew 23:1-12. How does this parallel some of the things James is saying here?

The important part is v1-7 though v8-12 provide some corrective.

Jesus is speaking about the Scribes and the Pharisees whose speech and actions don’t match up.

3. Look at Proverbs 10:11;15:1,2,4,22,31;

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16:24,27;18:21? How do these relate to James' word?

The Verses

Proverbs 10:11 The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked.

Proverbs 15:1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

Proverbs 15:2 The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.

Proverbs 15:4 The tongue that brings healing is a tree of life, but a deceitful tongue crushes the spirit.

Proverbs 15:22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.

Proverbs 15:31 He who listens to a life-giving rebuke will be at home among the wise.

Proverbs 16:24 Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.

Proverbs 16:27 A scoundrel plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire.

Proverbs 18:21 The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit.

And some others:

10:19 When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.

10:21 The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgement.

11:13 A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.

16:23 A wise man's heart guides his mouth, and his lips promote instruction.

18:13 He who answers before listening--that is his folly and his shame.

The bible, throughout, counsels God's people to be careful of their words. It was through words that man was led into sin in Genesis 3.

Significantly Jesus is called the 'Word' of God as he comes to cancel sin.

4. Discuss the results of careless speech and of careful speech.

Remember James is not counselling complete

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silence here. He is calling us to be very careful with our speech.

Speech can be used to teach – build up – but needs to be done with care.

Like wise speech can tear down dreadfully – we can all think of examples – probably are doing so right now.

Wise speech is a great thing – it can change the world – we preach the gospel.

Careless speech leads to ruin.

Motyer: *“James makes us face something we can and must do. As he examined the tongue, its place among our bodily faculties, the dangers it threatens, the fearful task of controlling such a restive beast, we may well have found it all too much, far beyond the capacity of our present state of sanctification. But we can make a start here. Here is something precise, limited, manageable. This is not beyond us; this is something we can tackle. It concerns the way we speak inwardly about a brother or sister, the way we speak to somebody else about a brother or sister, the way we speak to a brother or sister. If we are in earnest as we sit before the Word of God, then we admit what seems far in excess of our powers, but we can start here with a new respect for the image of God seen in the members of his family.”*

Apply

1. **“No human being can tame the tongue,” says James? Discuss how we should go about trying?**

James is exaggerating his point. We should try. The whole idea of thinking before we speak is so important.

The old mantra of *“Before you speak, think -Is it necessary? Is it true? Is it kind? Will it hurt anyone? Will it improve on the silence?”* (my internet reference attributed this to Sri Sathya Sai Baba (Indian Spiritual leader, b.1926) can be a good rule of thumb.

I used to quote to kids at school – “You have two ears and one tongue’ they should be used in that proportion.”

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D&S: *“This has large implications for all of us – for the elderly church goer who is constantly cranky with ‘the teenagers of today’; for the zealous young believer who praises God in church but knocks his mates and snipes at his mum; for the business professional who addresses employees and shop assistants as inferiors; for the wife who cuts her husband down (without appearing to do so); for the preacher who constantly admonishes his people and rarely encourages or praises them. The examples are endless, the point is the same: the tongue reveals the person.”*

2. How can we help each other in the area of speech?

This is one of those areas where our reticence to correct one another lets us down.

For discussion.

In D&S quoting Henry van Dyke: *“Never believe anything bad about anybody unless you positively know it to be true; never tell even that unless you feel that it is absolutely necessary – and that God is listening while you tell it.”*

For Next Week: Read James 3:13-18

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Study 6: JAMES 3:13-18

CHOOSING

Explore the Basics

Read the passage carefully together.

1. This passage speaks of two kinds of wisdom. What are they? What is behind them?

There is worldly wisdom and heavenly wisdom.

The worldly wisdom is spoken of as :
earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

Heavenly wisdom is spoken of as:

pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

Essentially heavenly wisdom is of God and earthly wisdom is of Satan.

D&S: *“The logic of the Christian life is clear in this passage. Doing good does not make us wise, any more that the fruit determines the species of a tree. Deeds ‘come from wisdom’, James says. They reveal who has truly received the wisdom of Christ.”*

2. What are the characteristics of worldly wisdom (v14-16)?

It issues in: *bitter envy and selfish, envy and selfish ambition, disorder and every evil practice.*

It is important to note here that these things work themselves out in our relationships.

It is worth picking up the ideas from earlier in James which characterise this worldly wisdom. E.g. 1:8,21,22-23.

3. What are the characteristics of the wisdom from above (v13,17-18)?

It issues in: *good life, deeds done in the humility, pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere, Peacemakers who sow in peace.*

Likewise these are relationship terms. True wisdom from above works itself out in truly Godly relationships.

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Again from earlier in the letter e.g. 1:5,19,27; 3:2.

And James culminates it with the idea of being peacemakers (v18)

D&S: *“The question all of us must ask in the light of James teaching is: am I working for peace in my Christian community and beyond.”*

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4. What is the result of each sort of wisdom?

Earthly wisdom results in disorder and evil practice – not said here but it results in death.

Heavenly wisdom results in *a harvest of righteousness* v18.

Again you can go back through James and see what is harvested from each.

Deeper and Wider

1. What is the answer to the rhetorical question in v13?

The answer is the one with *wisdom that comes from heaven.*

And who shows it by a 'good' life.

Motyer: *"Wisdom means a lot to James. It is both the key to steering a straight course through life's varied experiences (1:5) and the key to that basic rectification of the heart from which the new life will flow. In this, he is simply leaning back on the understanding and place of wisdom which he found in what he would have called simply 'the Scriptures'... It is understandable that his practical nature would find satisfaction in the insistence of the Scriptures that God's law is for living, and his truth is for thoughtful application to the varied circumstances of the day. In this, the purpose of Wisdom is, as Derek Kidner delightfully implies, to make 'the good people nice'"*

And further: *"Wisdom begins with knowing God. When Proverbs speaks of 'the fear of the LORD' (1:7) we need to be clear that it is going far beyond a prudential recommendation to watch our steps because big brother is watching us. Proverbs 2:5 and 9:10, for example, bring fear, knowledge, understanding (discernment) and wisdom together in a way which makes them inseparable. Our fear, then, is a proper reverence for one who has made himself known and whom we therefore know for [James, Page 130] ourselves. But the Bible nowhere places much value on knowledge that remains merely cerebral or credal. Nothing is known until it also reshapes the life. For this reason, the way of wisdom is the way of obedience (e.g. Dt. 4:5–6).*

'Knowledge', at its deepest, is living out a deep personal relationship. The Bible does not say that 'Adam knew Eve'

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(Gn. 4:1) through any reticence to speak plainly about sex. The verb 'to know' is not a polite periphrasis; it is a definition. Marriage exemplifies true knowledge; it also shows that knowledge is pretty dramatically life-changing! Wisdom is the God-given ability to see how 'in all our ways' (i.e. throughout the whole course and style of life) we may 'acknowledge (lit. 'know') him' (Pr. 3:6)."

2. Discuss each of the elements of 'wisdom that comes down from heaven'? Consider places you see these?

The elements are listed above.

The second part of the question is for discussion and consideration.

In reality the whole of James is giving us what this heavenly wisdom is all about. James both describes what it looks like in a person's life and describes what a life without it looks like.

B&K on 'humility that comes from wisdom' v13: *"The 'humility of wisdom' would have been an odd expression in the first-century Hellenistic world. Meekness was not a well-respected trait in much Greek thought. The NT writers, however, followed Jesus' teaching and understood meekness or humility to involve 'a healthy understanding of our own unworthiness before God and a corresponding humility and lack of pride in our dealings with our fellow-men.' Stulac calls it a 'yielding of oneself in ready teachability and responsiveness to God's word.'"*

3. How does this passage relate to the previous one about words and the tongue?

The notion of the taming, the wise use of the tongue, leads James on to the source of wisdom. Earthly wisdom and its characteristics lead to the sorts of wrong uses of the tongue James describes.

Heavenly wisdom (the kind we are to ask for in 1:5) leads to proper use of the tongue. It is worth noting how many of the positive characteristics are practised and or demonstrated by how we

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speak.

4. **Read Luke 18:9-14. How does this parable from James' brother illustrate James point?**

Here are two people who demonstrate almost precisely the two sorts of wisdom and their out working.

The Pharisee is the one who is 'wise' in himself (worldy wisdom) he 'knows' he is good, (And God is lucky to have him).

The Tax Collector is truly wise he knows his real status before God and begs for help from the One who can give it. (In a very broad sense his plea for mercy is a plea for wisdom in James' terms) The group may be able to cite other parables of Jesus which demonstrate this.

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It is interesting that the passage in Luke 9:18ff demonstrates the Rich Ruler's worldly wisdom. Whereas the little children in v15-17 demonstrate the attitude we need to come to heavenly wisdom with.

Apply

1. **Discuss examples you know of both sorts of wisdom. How do we discern the difference?**

Very easy to find examples of the 'earthly' sort in the press, the media.

Heavenly wisdom however

The answer is Jesus.

AND remember where it comes from James 1:5

For discussion.

B&K: *"Gerhard Maier summarizes well when he describes the "surprise" this passage contains: "One recognizes Christian wisdom from a person's mode of life. This means likewise not from his or her intelligence, rhetoric or relevance!"*

2. **How do we become wise? What can you do about it this week? Remember James 1:5.**

As I write this I have just come back from the South Pacific (tough work but someone has to do it) where I was involved in a consultation in regard to setting up Christian Teacher Training. I was also working on James over there. My colleague and I constantly claimed the promise of James 1:5 as we sought to provide 'heavenly' type wisdom to a reasonably complicated situation.

We always should be asking God for his sort of wisdom.

For Next Week: Read James 4:1-12

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Leader's Notes
on
Studies 7-11
will be available soon.