

James chapter one

James one of the 12 is writing to Jewish people who have been scattered, and believers in Christ who are handling persecution. He is aware of their trials and difficulties but encourages them that the Lord is with them and He will honour those who honour him.

He warns how slippery the path to sin is and urges vigilance and humility as we walk with God. He also reminds us that our faith needs a practical expression and that the care of orphans and widows is very important as we preach Christ.

Scattered Jews

There many Jews who did not live in Palestine. James wants them to come to faith just as many in Jerusalem had trusted Jesus. Generally speaking scattering speaks of judgement whereas coming together speaks of blessing. God wants us to know that whatever our circumstances He has a plan for us if we turn to Him.

Trials and temptations

Trials can be handled with joy when we realise that God has a very real purpose in allowing them. Endurance and steady commitment can flourish in the seed bed of adversity. When we refuse to give up our faith in Christ and remain loyal to Him it produces a maturity which speaks powerfully to an unbelieving world.

Wisdom and faith

In the midst of severe tests we need the wisdom of God. We must not invite trouble but must not compromise either. Making godly decisions in any circumstances is vital but when we appeal to God He will always help us to know what to do, how to act and what to say. We must however be in a place where we are decisive and clear. Doublemindedness will get us nowhere. Some trust in riches but we must focus on eternal. So much is transitory but God's will remains strong and does not fade.

More on temptation

There are many forms of trials but one major area is the temptation to sin. God allows temptation but he is not the one behind it. The devil never gives up so we must be alert.

The process of temptation is often a lust or desire surfaces and tries to preoccupy us. Then if unchecked it tries to dominate our thoughts. If still not resisted it becomes part of our actions and in some way or another it results in death.

What we thought we would never do has been done! We have been deceived.

How to live in this sinful world

God sends good things, good gifts. He is light and He is truth. Dwell on these good things. Be careful to make sound judgement and avoid impulsive thoughtless behaviour.

Receive the word of God like good seed into your heart. This means we read God's word, we meditate on our God's word and we obey God's word.

As we look into God's word it can be like a mirror. It will show me my true self and of course will reveal to me my true God.

Orphans and widows are unsupported and vulnerable. A true faith in God which says no to sin will also embrace the challenge of seeking to care for poor and needy in our church community and the world.

Points to consider

How mindful are we of the homeless and minority peoples around us. Are we willing to make the extra effort to reach them and move out of our comfort zone?

Do we complain about trials as enemies or do seek to embrace them as friends? Do we appreciate that God is working out His purposes in these things?

Are we asking God for wisdom in difficult times or are we trying to resolve issues in our strength.

How careful are we to resist the process of temptation or do we sink too far before realising we are in trouble?

We need to understand again the preciousness of God's word.

How practical is our response to God in terms of reaching out to the vulnerable

James chapter two

James now concentrates on his main theme. He is concerned that faith in God must be backed up by positive action. He has already talked about caring for the widow and orphans but takes the matter further. There is no place for favouritism. Our attitude to others must be affected by our walk by faith in God. The great hero of faith Abraham is mentioned and Rahab the prostitute is quoted as James build his case for demonstrating the importance of having a faith which changes us.

Receiving visitors to our meetings

James urges that all be welcomed equally. There should be no special treatment and no favours. The rich must be treated the same as the poor. Those who seem to have something to offer must not mean that those who appear to have nothing are pushed aside.

Honouring the poor and handling well the rich.

James reminds us that those who are poor among us materially can be rich in their walk with God. They can inherit the kingdom while those rich with this worlds goods end up with no reward from God.

Some of those who are rich are pursuing people in the courts, they are using their wealth to get more wealth and sometimes defenceless people who cannot afford to defend themselves are defeated and pressed down even harder.

Blasphemy can be practised again by the rich who fear no one because they think they can get their way and have no fear of God.

Love your neighbour as yourself

This is the royal law which was constructed by Almighty God Himself. The law of God must be kept in its entirety. This includes very much the care of others. If you fail in one area you have failed completely. The law gives freedom because mercy triumphs over judgement. However we must be merciful. To be judgemental and regimental will cause us to forfeit Gods mercy. We must be forgiving.

Faith without deeds

James uses what has become a very famous analogy. He says if someone is without clothes and food and you speak words of comfort but make no practical response your faith and your witness is dead. That's a dramatic assessment but makes the point powerfully. However alive you feel you are in your walk with God the reality is that with no practical expression of care your faith is not speaking to others it is dead. He also adds that the demons believe in God but obviously have no desire to worship Him. Faith must be active; it cannot truly exist without there being clear expression of godly deeds.

Abraham and Rahab.

Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness because he showed his devotion to God by being willing to sacrifice his son Isaac who was the means of God's promise to him being the father of a great nation. He believed God would still keep his promise even if he sacrificed Isaac. Rahab cared for the spies who came to Jericho at the risk of her life. She trusted God and when Joshua led his armies to victory she was spared.

Points to consider

What sort of people can attract our attention unfairly?

What are the dangers you perceive riches can bring?

How much do we see that failure in one area is total failure before God? Do we make excuses for our failures?

What practical steps can we take to show our faith is alive and not dead ?

JAMES CHAPTER 3

James has brought to our attention the need for wisdom and a godly reaction to trials and temptations. He has also urged us to demonstrate our faith in practical actions and caring for widows and orphans. Now he draws our attention to the need to guard our tongue and to seek God's wisdom in our lives.

Judgement for teachers.

James points out that those who teach God's word, which is a great privilege, are also accountable to God for what they teach. God will hold us responsible for what we say for many will believe our teaching and if we have presented error they will fall into many traps. Of course people should check out what they hear but the responsibility of the teacher is great. This is especially the case where people do not have Bibles to read themselves. We must be as accurate in what we say as we can and also must present God's word clearly so those who listen can respond in faith.

The power of the tongue

James uses three clear pictures

1 Bits in the mouth of a horse. The horse is a very powerful animal but can be guided by such a small piece placed between its teeth. The tongue also is very small but careless words can redirect our lives into foolish and godless paths.

2, Ships Very large ships can be directed by a small rudder. Despite strong winds and even storms the rudder can have its influence and slowly move the ship in a certain direction. What we say and how we say it can influence far beyond what we may have intended. We need to be very careful before we speak.

3. Fire. Massive fires which bring much destruction and even loss of life can start by a very small spark. A careless vindictive remark can result in much destruction. Criticism, malicious talk, back biting, lies, swearing and cursing come from the pit of hell itself and will do great damage. How thoughtful we must be and how disciplined to control our emotions avoiding outburst that we might later very much regret.

Taming the tongue

James warns us that taming the tongue is a massive task and without God's intervention we cannot manage it on our own.. Things are said then it's too late to retract those words. The very tongue which we use to pray, worship God and teach His word can be used for destruction. The fruit of our lips can be like fresh water or salty water. Our hearts must be cleansed by the blood of Jesus if we are to produce fruit that pleases God.

Our hearts.

It is vital that we deal with unforgiveness, resentment, envy, jealous, hatred; anger and that we seek the face of God and His wisdom. If we are walking close to God then our hearts will be filled with purity, peace, mercy and love. We will desire peace with our others and not fight them; we will desire reconciliation not war.

Points to consider

How carefully do we regard our teaching of God's word? Are we aware we will have to account to God for what we teach?

Think about the impact of your words. What seems so small can make a big difference for good or evil. Ask God to show you whether there is any critical vindictive spirit in what you say.

Have we spoken something to someone recently that we now regret? Come before God and repent.

How is our walk with God today? Are seeking His face and His will? Draw near to Him now so that we find our hearts fuelled by His wisdom not by our foolishness.

Do we stir up and fuel arguments or do we seek to bring peace and reconciliation?

JAMES CHAPTER 4

James continues to be very practical in his teaching as he urges Christian behaviour to be present alongside faith and understanding. He is concerned about professing Christians who are proud and arrogant playing into the hands of the evil one. He also urges us to value each day as it comes and not be presumptuous about the future.

Fights and quarrels

Sadly in the body of Christ there can be infighting. James urges us to deal with our hearts. It is not external circumstances that give rise to bitterness and conflict; it is so often unresolved issues within us. Covetousness, desire for position, feelings that we have been overlooked unfairly can find their expression in quarrelling and poor attitudes towards others.

Coming to God

We must seek God's face and look to Him to guide us and ask Him to shape our desires. Prayers that are self-centred will only serve to alienate us from God but prayers that desire the work of God's grace to have His way with us will result in wanting what God wants.

Friends of the world

The world is adulterous, immoral, and unfaithful. As believers we must have nothing to do with these things. We belong to God who is our friend and Saviour and who is the enemy of sin.

Humility and drawing near to God

God opposes pride and the proud. If we humble ourselves before and seek His face He will grant grace to us and will help us overcome sin and the devil. The devil tries to make us think that we are powerless to overcome his schemes and plans. That we are unable to resist his enticing temptations but RESIST THE DEVIL and he will flee from you. As we humble ourselves before God, we seek to be clear and focused on His will; we purify our hearts by deliberately separating from sin and sinful situations. We are careful to speak well of others and must not judge them or accuse them falsely. God alone is judge and He has given us His law to see what is right and what is wrong.

Boasting about tomorrow

James raises serious concerns about the arrogant attitude some have towards life. He reminds us that life is fragile and our planning can be so easily interrupted. Life can be taken so suddenly, we must submit with reverence that we are in God's hands and that His will is crucial.

Points to consider

Have we stopped to consider why we are quarrelling with someone? Have we asked the question whether there is something inside us that needs to be resolved?

How much time do we spend seeking God? Are we spending time in other matters which should be made available to God?

Are there areas of our lives that have become too friendly with the world? Are we prepared to be ruthless and part company with these things?

Do we humble ourselves before God? Are we seeking to resolve things our way and not His way?

Do we resist the devil or do we encourage him in our lives?

Are we appreciating the gift of life or taking it for granted?

JAMES CHAPTER 5

In this concluding chapter James covers a number of important topics. He talks about the problems of the rich; he speaks about the need for patience's particularly as we wait for the Lord's return. He considers those in the church who are sick and need prayer and the example of the prayer life of Elijah.

The Rich

James challenges strongly those who are rich but also very unrighteous with their dealing with money. He speaks of the foolishness of storing up wealth which can easily disappear. Having wealth isn't sinful but when it replaces God in our lives it is very destructive.

Waiting for the Lord's return

We are compelled to believe that Jesus truly is returning. Just as the farmer has to patiently prepare the field, sow the seed and then wait for the harvest, we too can wait with expectancy that Jesus will come. While we wait we must also be vigilant to handle each other with care and respect. James uses the phrase 'standing at the door'. This again conveys a sense of immense, we must be ready. His return can be so sudden and is so close.

The patience of Job

James reminds us of Job who is a great inspiration of someone holding onto God despite many trials and many challenges. Job is convinced that his redeemer lives. We must wait with simplicity and humility; God's word will be fulfilled.

Praying for the sick

Healing is available is the unbeliever in fact Jesus healed many people who did not continue with Him and who did not receive Him as saviour. These acts of healing were compassion and pointers to the healing of salvation if people would receive that. Sick believers can also be healed; one provision is for the elders of the church to be summoned, to anoint with oil those who are sick and to pray for them. Elders need to be humble and ready to offer prayer with a good spirit and attitude. For God's people to call elders is an act of humility and submission and a demonstration of a good attitude towards their leadership. James does link personal sin with sickness. This does not mean that every time we sin we become sick but it is important to ask the question when we are sick "is there any unconfessed sin in my life"? Such openness to God has too pave the way for blessing and without doubt if there was sin in the world there would be no sickness. We desire that our prayers are effective and powerful and so it is vital to maintain a good relationship with God. If we allowed anything into our lives which displeases God, how can we expect Him to hear us?

Elijah

The prayer life of Elijah is an amazing challenge. He was so close to God that he could declare rain or no rain. The effects of this were clearly dramatic because when he declared no rain, there was famine in the land. James points out that this man of God was a human being like us with fragility and weakness. We are all vulnerable, we can all fall into sin but James challenges us to live close to God so that we can bring God's help to others.

Points to consider

- Many of us many not be rich but do we heed the warnings of scripture? Materialism can be so damaging to our relationship with God.
- We are to wait for the return of Jesus. How significant is the knowledge that He is coming in your life?
- Are we able to recognise the lessons of patience that God is working into our lives? Are we oblivious to these things or are we learning the lessons that they teach us?
- Do you practice the laying of hands and anointing of oil for the sick? Why is this important? What does this practice teach us? How do we handle confessing our sins to one another?