



# MONDAY 02 JANUARY 2017

SERIES: THE LETTER OF JAMES

Read: James 2:1-4

## Plug In...

James is a very practical letter. It describes live situations. To these situations James gives simple but stringent commands. There are 59 commands in James; each crisp with moral clarity. Shortly in chapter 2 it will be clear James is not saying "get this all right to get God". We'll see soon these are gospel-imperatives (gospel-driven-commands). However, James never dilutes that for the genuine Christian the gospel will make an ever-increasing impact on our lives – on what we *do* (1:25 - "be doers of the word").

James holds the mirror up to us with three tests (1:26-27). The mirror asks us to self-reflect: 'Who am I?' 'What am I becoming?' 'What am I *doing*?' 'Do I like what I see?' 'What does God see?'.

The tests (i) Have you got control of your tongue? – v.26; (ii) Do you care for the poor? – v.27a; (iii) Have you separated yourself from the world's pollution? – v.27b. James works through the middle test (# ii) first at the opening of chapter 2.

## **Chew It Over...**

The fact that some Christians were acting as 'judges' with evil thoughts (v.4) is at one level an example of listening to the word but not doing what it says. At a deeper level however, it reveals a more profound problem! In the Old Testament, care for orphans and widows was commanded in imitation of God's own concern for them. In Psalm 68:5 God is described as "the Father of the fatherless and protector of widows". The orphan and widow in the Old Testament are key examples of all those who are needy, helpless and vulnerable in the world.

Why do you show favouritism? Why is it so offensive to God?

Consider those 'helpless' or needy ones among and around us. How can you help them? [Be concrete. Consider joining the various groups at The Lakes that help in this area, i.e., 'Helping Hands'.]

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Pray for forgiveness for the times you have shown undue favouritism at the expense of the poor in the eyes of the world'. Ask God to give you a loving heart for the unloved.



# TUESDAY 03 JANUARY 2017

SERIES: THE LETTER OF JAMES

Read: James 2:5-7

## **Plug In...**

Should Christians ever judge anything? Of course! (*cf.* Matthew 7:1-6). James shows that a problem Christians face is that by nature our judgements tend to be based on the wrong criteria. James here refers to the situation where a person is judged according to externals.

## **Chew It Over...**

What is the reality of the internal situation of the poor and rich in his example?

What judgement or choices have you been making (especially those concerned with people)? Are they based on godly or worldly thinking? Does the financial situation, social background etc. of someone affect the way you treat them?

How would church be different if we followed James' command?

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Pray for Godly wisdom and insight for the choices and judgements you make. Pray that The Lakes will be full of godly people living together in this way. Pray for a heart that sees all people the way God does.



# WEDNESDAY 04 JANUARY 2017

SERIES: THE LETTER OF JAMES

Read: James 2:8-11

## **Plug In...**

The term 'royal law' refers to the law of the King. At the heart of all of the King's law is love. Jesus said first love for God, then love for neighbour (Matthew 22:37-40). Favouritism violates love. James shows that the King's law is a unity. Break it in one area you don't just get a demerit point, it sinks you whole.

## **Chew It Over...**

This makes an important point about sin. Sin is deeper than the misdemeanours, although that is no less condemned. The root of sin comes from the disposition of our heart. Does it love God? Does it love neighbours. In the moment, our heart can be unloving. If this happens frequently then we may not be who we claim to be. The law needs to convict us now so we might change.

Who do you find "unlovable"? Where have you pushed them down? (Think attitude, actions directed towards them; actions neglected towards them). Work hard to expose your favouritism and resolve to deal with it by seeking mercy and asking the Lord to help you next time.

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Pray that you will recognise the prevalence of your sin and God's response to it.



## THURSDAY 05 JANUARY 2017

SERIES: THE LETTER OF JAMES

Read: James 2:12-13

### **Plug In...**

James moves our perspective to the End. There will be a judgement. There is a judgement according to God's law. Christians will be judged as to their conformity to the will of God expressed by Jesus (Matthew 7:21-27). We are told to speak and act in light of this.

### **Chew It Over...**

With 59 commands in James, and verse 12 a command too, here it is the gospel which drives obeying these commands (without it these commands are just a burden – especially as we realise our failure). A few things to note. The criteria Christians are judged by is called “the law that gives freedom”. Some translations say “law of liberty”. For the Christian seeking to obey the law of God is no longer issues in just threat from an impossible burden, for we have been ‘liberated’. The Christian is freed from the penalty of sin and given the Spirit (explained in James as “the implanted word able to save us” - 1:21).

The resounding statement: “Mercy triumphs over judgment”. This truth is said to Christians who look in the mirror and are convicted that they've shown favouritism. We see God's mercy again in our lives and move forward escaping our failures. We start speaking and acting more with mercy because we understand we've been shown such grace.

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Ask the Lord to make you aware were you have been showing favouritism, or situations where you would default to unlovable attitudes and actions. May the mercy of God triumph in your life and ask that this flows out in this situation/relationship.



## FRIDAY 06 JANUARY 2017

SERIES: THE LETTER OF JAMES

Read: James 2:14-17

### **Plug In...**

These verses hold the climax of James' argument about genuine Christianity. At stake here is the nature of true faith. The person that truly gets the gospel (a lawbreaker to whom mercy has been shown) will dispense mercy themselves. The person who gets the gospel will spot a failure to live up to God's ideal, cast themselves back on God's mercy, and then go speak and act differently. How we treat the poor, the needy, the vulnerable, the neglected shows whether we've got the gospel or not (by 'got' we mean it is *implanted*).

### **Chew It Over...**

It is possible to go to church, Bible college, read God's word, heck open and read the *Daily Bible Reading Email*, but if we look in the mirror and fail tragically the tests James gives us, the test of caring for the poor – our faith is dead! (2:17).

Ask yourself if you are in some weird performance called 'Christianity?' There is mercy instead of judgement for those that recognise the gap, who humble themselves for grace.

James 4:6 – “But God gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble. Submit yourselves, then, to God”.

## **Prayer Suggestion**

Pray and thank God that faith in Jesus is not dry and theoretical, but a truth which results in action.



## WEEKEND 07-08 JANUARY 2017

SERIES: THE LETTER OF JAMES

Read: James 2:18-25

### **Plug In...**

Verse 20 reads, *"You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?"* Remember James said look in the mirror (1:22-25). If there is a gap in your life between what you've say and what you do, then James is urging his readers to spot it and close the gap. He tells the story of Abraham, and the story of Rahab effectively asking "Are you willing to learn the right way to think and behave?"

### **Chew It Over...**

God's grace comes through His word. James' letter is God's word to Christians. It's job it to cause us to evaluate, take stock, repent, and turn around when we see gaps. Looking in the mirror and responding rightly shows the word is alive, faith is alive. Remember, God's goal for Christians is that they mature and lack nothing (1:4). He does this by testing us (1:2-3). God's tests are not a curse, rather the tests are His gifts (1:17). Gifts to make sure we're genuine, that we are indeed "newly born", the harvest ("firstfruits") of His work (1:18).

The test comes in many forms, it may be persecution, or it may be finding someone needy placed alongside you. What are you going to do? Sometimes we fail the test, Christians are sinful and worldly (4:1-4) so don't always pass each individual test. So ask for wisdom (1:5). So, let the story of Abraham and the like challenge you to close the gap. Again, ask for wisdom to close the gap – God gives generously to all who ask.

### **Prayer Suggestion**

Pray giving thanks for the faith we have in Christ, that it shapes and moulds us to be more like him in every way.