



ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Bible Study

APRIL

2011

MORNING & EVENING SERMONS

GOOD FRIDAY

During the first two weeks of April we conclude our study of the book of James as James offers us practical teaching on faith. There are some stern words for those with wealth and privilege. He addresses those who are suffering, providing the encouragement of faith which can lift up the suffering. The church is to live out its faith in its life and ministry to those who need help and encouragement.

In the second half of April we review John's accounts of the triumphal entry on Palm Sunday and the events of Easter Day. Five days before the Feast of the Passover Jesus entered Jerusalem. The crowd hailed Him as a saviour and King of Israel.

Jesus rode on a donkey, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. But what sort of saviour and king did the people expect? Even the disciples seemed uncertain at this stage as to who Jesus really was.

Who do we think Jesus is? What do we expect of Him and what has He done for us?

As we re-visit the Easter event it is time for us to ponder again the Easter account as it speaks to us. Let us come before the Christ who died for us and rose again, and allow His salvation and liberation to work on our lives and transform us once more.

3 APR 2011	JAMES 5:1-12 A WARNING TO THE RICH AND AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE SUFFERING
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JAMES 5:1-12: A WARNING TO THE RICH AND AN ENCOURAGEMENT TO THE SUFFERING

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

Introduction

Uncommon for many Singaporeans to ride on the wave of our country's success and gain wealth as our economy prospers. Self-indulgence and insensitivity to others' needs can easily take over our outlook of life. Here in vv1-6, James' prophetic word places his readers under God's indictment at His return. Miseries are coming and along with them His judgement.

The historical context of James has to be borne in mind as the rich at his time generally abused their wealth and privilege. That being said, such abuse is still happening today to our sadness and shame. James' warning is thus pertinent for us who are comparatively much better off than many, economically and in terms of standard of living. We need to ask God to search our hearts individually and corporately as a congregation, as a church, as a society; whether we should and could do more for others. How then should we live in order that we may be living testimonies of God's love and compassion?

In vv7-12, James turns his attention from the evil and callous rich to the poor and encourages from Biblical examples the oppressed, the poor and the suffering. He shows how the prophets and those who persevered like Job, endured trials and sufferings in spite of their circumstances. In so doing, they maintained their faith in God whose character "is full of compassion and mercy".

For Study and Discussion

1. You Rich People (vv1- 6)

- a. In these verses, James is talking to "*rich people*". What does he mean by "*rich people*"? In these verses, James lists certain actions of these "*rich people*":
 - i. v3 – What do they do with their wealth?

 - ii. v4 – How do they treat their workers? (Dt 24: 14- 15)

 - iii. v5 – How do they live their lives?

 - iv. v6 – How do they treat others?

- b. If James were writing his letter today – what other "actions" would he use as examples of "*rich people*"?

- c. How about us? Would James consider us "*rich people*"?

d. What will happen to the “*rich people*”?

2. Brothers... (vv7- 12)

James now turns to people who are suffering, specifically to those amongst his readers who are Christians

a. They are encouraged to be patient

i. For how long? (vv7, 8),

ii. Three examples are given of patient people. Who are they? Why are they an example?

v7 :

v10 :

v11 :

b. They are told **not** to do two things. What are they not to do? Why should they not do them?

i. v9 :

ii. v12 :

Discipleship Pointers

By any standards, many of those of us from Singapore as well those from other countries are considered rich. We should take seriously what James is saying here. James is not so much concerned about wealth as about the corrupting effects of wealth.

Let us look at ourselves:

- a. How do we treat our money? Are we hoarding it to nobody's good? If so – It will disappear – “*your wealth has rotted... your gold and silver are corroded.*”
- b. How do we treat those under us – our maids, our subordinates, the hawkers, the waiters, the shop assistants, etc? Do we pay them on time – it is a sin not to do so (Dt 24:15)? Do we treat them well? Do we even consider them human and equal?
- c. Let us look at our lives – would James put us in his “*rich people*” category? If so what are we doing about it?

What is our behaviour like?

- a. Are we patient in times of difficulties?
- b. Do we grumble about other people?

We should be people who persevere in our troubles – particularly if the troubles come because of our faith. We should be people who are patient and people who do not grumble. The Lord we believe in, He is full of compassion and mercy.

Family/Group Moment

As a group or family discuss your attitude to wealth. What possessions do you have and how much do you treasure these? Do these harm your relationship with God? Discuss honestly how you would feel if you lost these possessions or if they were destroyed.

Identify the groups/types of people in Singapore who are poor – much poorer than you. Do your actions or inactions make life more difficult for these people? How do you treat those who you have direct contact with? Are you living ‘on earth in luxury and self-indulgence’ (v.5) and is this at the expense of others?

JAMES 5:13-20: THE PRAYER OF FAITH

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

Introduction

James offers practical teaching on faith as he concludes his letter. He addresses the suffering, providing encouraging solutions of faith and how these actions of faith lift up the suffering. The church is to live out faith in its life and ministry to those who need help and encouragement. James' teaching here links actions with faith. Faith is not just something one professes but is seen in practical implementation in active terms. How do we as a church proactively implement our faith?

1. Prayer in good times and bad (vv13-16a)
(V13: 'Trouble' here is the same word as that translated 'suffering' in v10. 'Happy' refers to inner peace and contentment that comes from trust in God, despite our circumstances, not because of them.)
 - a. In v13 we are told that whatever our physical or emotional state, our response should be the same – what is that response (see 1 Cor 14:15)? Why does James specifically mention “trouble” and “happiness”? Is this how we usually respond to our circumstances?
 - b. What should we pray for when we are “in trouble”? What qualities has James been talking about in relation to suffering in vv7-10?
 - c. Which comes most naturally to us – to pray when times are hard, to give thanks when we are cheerful, or not to pray at all? How can we work on the one we find hardest of all and “improve”?
2. Prayer in times of illness of body or soul (vv14-16a)
These verses contain instructions as to how to act when a fellow Christian is ill and when he has sinned. Note however that James is not telling us that illness and sins are immediately connected, that all physical illness comes from sins – but neither is he saying that this is never the case.
 - a. It might be assumed that being sick would naturally fall within the “trouble” mentioned in v13, but why does James treat it separately? What would bring about the sort of suffering referred to in v10? What might bring about sickness?
 - b. What is the process outlined by James for dealing with physical sickness of Christians (vv14-15)? Which of these actions is the most important and why?
(Anointing with oil is a practice familiar enough to James' readers for no further explanation to be needed. There are hardly any NT references to 'anointing with oil' (see Mark 6:13 for the other one) which can lead to lots of speculation about this point. The practice was used in the OT as a symbolic act to show that a person or object, was set apart for God. So a similar symbolic understanding would probably help in this case.)

- c. How does our understanding of 'faith' help us to understand v15? Who or what do we place our faith in? Does God have to heal a sick person, or must we accept His will even when that means no healing? (You may like to consider Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' which he refers to in 2 Cor 12:7-10)

- d. How does James link healing to forgiveness of sins? Do we ever make this link ourselves?

- 3. Praying for one another (vv16-20)
 - a. James gives us a very important task to undertake on behalf of our fellow Christians (vv16a, 19). What is that responsibility? How could it be discharged in ORPC? Are we actively involved in this aspect of our Christian life?

 - b. Why is this possibly the most important aspect of all prayer? (v20)

 - c. James describes the sort of person who can undertake this kind of responsibility (vv16b-18). How may this description apply to any one of us? Is this solely the role of elders or for the church body at large? What are the characteristics stressed here?

Discipleship pointers:

We may want to do this by preparing together for a time of prayer, using these pointers below as aids to consider what we should be praying for:

1. Are we in trouble? How are we praying for perseverance?
2. Are we happy? For what do we want to give thanks?
3. Are we sick in body or in soul? What do we need to do?
4. Are we discharging our responsibility to our fellow congregation members in the way we pray for them? How could we serve them better?
5. How is our walk with God and with one another? Are we ready to pray together?

Family Moment

Talk together as a group/family about how much harder it can be to articulate a "thank you" or any expression of thanks, than to demand for something or even to say "please" for something. Often when we have a need, we are reminded to do something about that need. That can just be the same with the way we pray. When we are sad, sick, worried or lonely we remind ourselves to pray. However, when we do not have anything to "ask" God for, do we make sure we say "thank you" to Him and praise Him for all good things that come from Him?

JOHN 12:12-19: WHO DO WE THINK JESUS IS?

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

Introduction

Five days before the Feast of the Passover Jesus entered Jerusalem. The crowd hailed Him as a saviour and King of Israel. Jesus rode on a donkey, fulfilling Old Testament prophecy. But what sort of saviour and king did the people expect? The passage looks back to Jesus' power over life and death, signified by the raising of Lazarus, and looks forward to Jesus' glorification. In this short passage, John highlights key elements of Jesus and His relationship with the people. Even the disciples seemed uncertain at this stage as to who Jesus really was. Who do we think Jesus is? What do we expect of Him and what has He done for us?

1. The Crowd (vv12-13)

Many Christian traditions call this day "Palm Sunday". However, the reference to palms occurs only here, in John's Gospel. Extra-biblical references from early Judaism, however, tell us that the Jewish freedom-fighter, Simon Maccabeus entered Jerusalem in triumph and palm branches were strewn in his path in 152 bc.

- i. What festival had the crowd come to attend?
- ii. "*Hosanna*", a Hebrew word, only appears in the New Testament in connection with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem. What does "*Hosanna*" mean? Why was the crowd shouting this?
- iii. The crowd hailed Jesus as "King of Israel". What do you think the authorities thought of this?
- iv. Overall, what do you think the crowd was expecting and hoping Jesus would do?

2. A King on a donkey (vv14-16)

- i. What do you think the crowd thought when Jesus got onto a young donkey?
- ii. V16 refers to "all this". What is "all this" that the disciples didn't understand?
- iii. Where does the quotation in v15 come from?
- iv. Read Zech 9:9 and 10. What do these tell you about the sort of king God plans to provide?
- v. How do you think the Scriptural prophecy in Zechariah compares with what the crowd was hoping for?
- vi. "Only after Jesus was _____ did they realise that these things had been written about Him" (v16). What does this word mean – see vv23-28?

3. The Last “Sign” (vv 17-19)

- i. Why does John make reference to the raising of Lazarus here?

- ii. What power did Jesus have?

- iii. John always uses the word “sign” where the other three Gospels refer to “miracles”. For John the miraculous doings of Jesus are more than “just” miracles – they are also signs; the things that happen have significance. The last “sign” John records is that of Lazarus who, after several days dead in the tomb, was raised to life. What does this sign point to?

- iv. “[T]he whole world has gone after Him” said the Pharisees. What did the Pharisees mean by this (and what does John mean by this)?

Discipleship Pointers

The contrast between the crowd’s expectations of Jesus as a worldly conquering hero and the true Jesus who entered Jerusalem on a donkey, knowing that there He would meet His death, has often been displayed in the life of the church. Sometimes, it seems, the church has been enthralled in the same way as the crowd, seeing Jesus primarily as a worldly conquering hero. Looking, with sadness, at how the church has often distorted the gospel message should always serve as a warning to us.

This passage compels us to question and question again our understanding of Jesus Christ. We can easily identify with the hopes and aspirations of the crowd whilst knowing the awful reality of what Jesus faced. Are we prepared to conform our lives to the submission, humiliation and perhaps degradation that Jesus faced, or do we still long for worldly success, glory and victory?

God, through Jesus Christ, offers us the power of life over death, as surely as He gave this to Lazarus.

Will you let your life be ruled by a King who is righteous and gentle, rode on a donkey and proclaimed peace to the nations (Zech 9:9-10)?

Family/Group Moment

Get each member of the group/family to name a characteristic of Jesus (for example, “humility”). As a group, go through this list and write down what implications each characteristic has, for how we live our lives. Now compile a list of those characteristics of a “king” which conflict with our understanding of Jesus – then write down how we can avoid our lives being ruled by these characteristics.

JOHN 20:1-18: ENIGMA AND ENCOUNTER

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

Introduction

Earlier in his Gospel, John tells of the raising of Lazarus who was brought back to life (see Jn 11:1-44), only to die again. But Jesus was not simply restored to life; He was raised to life! Life that cannot be destroyed; life that transforms human lives, giving them life forevermore. Jesus' raising is the Resurrection – that Reality to which Lazarus' resuscitation and sign pointed. Like Mary Magdalene, Peter and John (the disciple Jesus loved) at the first Easter, we can easily overlook the significance and reality of Jesus' Resurrection and the saving and liberating power it, alone, brings to us.

Easter after Easter, these are themes we are made most familiar with. Perhaps it is time for us to ponder again the Easter account as it speaks to us. So that we can be brought before the Christ who died for us and rose again, and allow His salvation and liberation to touch and transform us once more.

1. The "Empty" Enigma (vv1-9)

Up to then, Joseph of Arimathaea and Nicodemus were secret disciples of Jesus (see 19:38-42 cf. 3:1; 7:50-52). Now they risked public exposure and their position as they openly laid Jesus' body into a cave-tomb. The embalming with spices (altogether 75 pounds in weight) had to be hurriedly done so as not to "defile the land" (see Dt 21:23) as it was the Day of Preparation and the Sabbath began at sunset on Friday evening. Then the tomb was sealed as the large stone was rolled over, covering the cave entrance.

Jesus' tomb from the description given in vv5-7 was most likely limestone and had a low entrance with a step leading down into a central, rectangular pit. Shelves were cut into the rock at the sides of the pit. If Jesus' body was placed on one of the shelves with the head facing the entrance, only part of the graveclothes could be seen upon entering the tomb. This would also explain why the cloth for the head could only be noticed then. Jesus' graveclothes consisted of strips of linen or a shroud or both and the burial cloth for the head, which was either a face covering or a cloth tied around the face to hold the jaw in place.

- i. John emphasises the large stone being removed and the empty tomb on Easter morning. What is he also trying to tell us when he specifically mentioned that Jesus' graveclothes were in good order (vv5-7)? How would you explain to someone John's rather detailed description in your own words?
- ii. Why is John saying that he "saw and believed" even when the disciples then "still did not understand from Scripture" (vv8-9)? What did John see and what did he believe?
- iii. Why do you think John gives such a detailed account of what happened on the first Easter morning? Why is the Resurrection of Jesus so important to us (see 1 Cor 15:14-19)?

OPTIONAL QUESTION:

- iv. Why does Scripture play such an important role especially in emphasising its fulfilment in the Easter accounts (v9 cf. 19:28-37; 1 Cor 15:3-5ff)?

2. The Easter Encounter (vv10-18)

The stone was removed and Mary assumed that someone must have stolen Jesus' body. She was so grief-stricken that she might have been blinded from recognising Jesus when He appeared. In all probability, she did not expect Jesus to rise. Indeed she thought He was the gardener who had taken away Jesus' body. Then, when she heard her name called, she responded immediately *Rabboni*, as the scales fell off her eyes, so to speak. Later, Mary's weeping (v11) was turned into joy (v16) fulfilling Jesus' promise to His disciples in Jn 16:20-22.

- i. Why was Mary Magdalene still lingering at the empty tomb and weeping given the other disciples' response (v8 cf. v13)?
- ii. What caused Mary to realise that it was Jesus who was right before her (vv14-16)? What would be the reasons for her not to recognise Him (see also Lk 24:31)?
- iii. What does Jesus' response in not allowing Mary to hold on to Him tells us about His new relationship with her (v17a)? We see too, Jesus' greatest joy and centre of reference was His Father (v17b). How do these insights encourage us to get out of our comfort zone to proclaim Jesus (and hence God the Father too) to be our Lord like Mary did (v18)?

OPTIONAL QUESTION:

- iv. Paul's mention of more than 500 witnesses including all the apostles, James (Jesus' brother) and he himself (1 Cor 15:1-9); reminds us that the Resurrection is a fact attested by history. What would you do to "always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks... with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience... good behaviour in Christ..." (1 Peter 3:15-16).

Discipleship Pointers

All the four Gospels contain accounts of several Resurrection appearances. With Acts 1:3-8 and 1 Cor 15:5-8, there are altogether twelve recorded appearances (first six in Jerusalem, then four in Galilee, one on the Mount Olives and one on the Damascus road). These appearances are characterised with a distinctly personal aspect as individuals or groups of individuals encountered Jesus always resulting to faith in Him. Apart from showing the classic characteristics of independent witnesses, the encounters (of Peter, John and Mary Magdalene) remind us that faith in God rests on one's individual commitment to personal relationship with God's only Son. However, the emphasis here is not so much the "proofs" or the miraculous, although they are important; but it is "these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name" (vv30-31).

- The Christian faith stands or falls on the truth of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:14-20). As Jesus rose bodily from the dead, we have the confidence and certainty:
- He will accomplish all that He has promised as we can know and affirm that His life and words are all true.
- He is the living Christ and God – the Ruler of His eternal Kingdom and represents us before God.
- Of our own bodily resurrection and that death is not the end – there is future life eternal in Christ.
- The same life-giving divine power is also available for our spiritually dead selves to be brought back to life and transformed into new life with Christ – sins forgiven and purification from all unrighteousness..
- Of our basis for the church's witness to the world.

Mary did not meet the risen Christ until she discovered that His tomb was empty. Then she responded with joy and obedience by telling about Him to the other disciples. We cannot meet the risen Christ until we, too, discover that His tomb is empty and that Jesus is indeed alive. Do you also then respond with joy and obedience by telling the good news and sharing with others?

Family/Group moment

Share with one another in the group/family how you deal with your doubts regarding the reality of Jesus? Or is it enough just to "have faith"?