



ORCHARD ROAD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Bible Study

MARCH

2011

MORNING & EVENING SERMONS

THE LETTER OF JAMES

It's common to urge one-another to 'walk the talk' of the Christian life. Let's face it, many of us need that exhortation, for its easier for most of us to talk and talk about the faith. The Letter of James is a warm and practical encouragement to turn our words of faith into works of faith. In this series of studies we will zero in on four of the practical and specific exhortations to action. Let's hear what James writes and then go and do it!

6 MAR 2011	JAMES 1:19-27: BE DOERS OF THE WORD
13 MAR 2011	JAMES 2:1-13 SHOW NO FAVOURITISM
20 MAR 2011	JAMES 3:1-12 TAMING THE TONGUE
27 MAR 2011	JAMES 4:1-12 DRAW NEAR TO GOD

JAMES 1:19-27: BE DOERS OF THE WORD

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

Introduction

James' Letter addresses a mainly Jewish audience who was scattered across the ancient Near East and had known the Old Testament Law well, having grown up in it. Apparently, these Jewish Christians saw freedom in Christ and from the Law to mean that the way they lived didn't really matter. So James wrote to show that true faith should express itself in a changed life. If all we have to do to be saved is merely believe how then will our lives change? How does faith in Christ work with the rest of Bible with all its instructions for how we are to live?

Here the passage states a key theme in vv.22-25 while making some applications in vv19-21 and vv26-27 as well. James is not anti-doctrinal for he does not dismiss the importance of hearing God's word. Not only does true doctrine save, it also produces good deeds and good deeds in turn are the necessary manifestations of true doctrine.

James is not trying to change the emphasis from hearing the word (as the path to salvation) to doing the word (the faith versus works argument). Indeed we are probably fooling ourselves that we have faith, if we have been hearing God's word without any corresponding action on our part.

Vv19-21 include the works of a balanced temperament that equates to righteousness, while vv26-27 touch on the tongue (see Chap 3 below) before making a familiar Old Testament call for care of the poor and vulnerable.

1. Take Note! vv19-21

a) To whom is James addressing this book, and therefore this passage? See James 1:1; 18 and 2:1.

b) What is James' ultimate desire for his readers? Verses 20b and 21b.

c) The passage includes warnings about behaviour that does not lead to righteousness. What advice does James give his readers about their behaviour? Whose responsibility is it to bring about the change of behaviour? Is it the change of behaviour that leads to salvation, or something else?

2. Listening and Doing. vv22-25

It is this point about 'the word' (v21) that leads into a main theme of The Letter of James and one which addresses a very real problem that can affect many people who profess to be Christians:

a) What are some people doing with 'the word' ('the word of truth' v18, 'the word planted in you' v21) and how is this dangerous? Is v22 referring to the same sort of listening that is being talked about in v19?

b) How do you think the image of a mirror helps us to understand the difference as well as the inter-dependency between 'listening' and 'doing'?

c) Of course this is not about mirrors. With what attitude should we approach the Bible and Bible study? What will be the result of studying the Bible? Whose responsibility is this?

d) V25 "... the perfect law that gives freedom..." What is this? Where do we find it, why is it perfect and how does it give freedom? (Consider Mt 5:17 in its context, and Mt 11:28-30).

3. More practical applications vv26-27

a) This is the second time in this passage James has warned us about our tongues. What should we do about it? (See 1 Peter 3:10-12).

This makes one basic assumption – that we are listening to the word. If you are not in the habit of Bible Study then start today. You can find practical help with this on the ORPC website.

b) This is also the second time he has warned us about the danger of 'deceiving ourselves' (v26 cf. v22). What have we learned?

c) Who are the 'orphans and widows' that we can look after? How do we keep ourselves from being polluted by the world? In what areas do we need to keep going as we are, and in what areas do we need to change our behaviour?

Discipleship Point

V22 Don't merely listen to the word... do what it says.

- If we are serious about the passage we have just studied, we will take action to change our behaviour in one or more areas where we know we are falling short of God's standard.

- We can find God's standard by reading the Bible. If we claim to have faith by reading the Bible, how can we then not respond to the challenge to our behaviour that we find in the Bible?

Family Moment

Consider the last time you had a review or Parent-Teacher conference. Assuming an area for improvement was identified, how did you go about making that improvement? How can you learn from that example to help implement v22?

JAMES 2:1-13: SHOW NO FAVOURITISM

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

Introduction

It is basic to the gospel that God does not show favouritism. All equally need Jesus, all are equally able to come to Jesus and all are equal in Jesus. This passage applies that gospel principle to relationships within the church. It is easy and common to divide people according to their socio-economic standing and give 'first class' treatment to those at the top, and budget treatment to those at the bottom. James pulls us up. God chooses the 'poor' to be rich in His kingdom. The 'rich' were the ones then giving believers a hard time in the law courts. This is all linked back to the basic command of the law regarding "others" – to love them as ourselves. Partiality towards certain persons is a failure in a significant part of that love and thus makes us transgressors before God. In what ways do we see partiality within our church community? What can we do to reverse it and to guard against it?

'Not only the mature Christian is patient in testing (James 1), but he also practices the truth. This is the theme of James 2. Immature people talk about their beliefs, but the mature person lives his faith. Hearing God's word (James 1:22-25) and talking about God's word can never substitute for doing God's Word.'

– Warren Wiersbe, *Be Mature*, p.63, Chariot Victor Publishing, 1978.

James 2:1-4: Show No Favouritism

1a). Have you ever been discriminated against by your church leaders or members? How do you feel about this? Have you discriminated against other church members or leaders? Why?

b). In what ways do you see partiality within our church community? What can we do to reverse it and to guard against it?

James 2:5-9: Keep the Royal Law

"... the main reason why this is a royal law is that obeying it makes you a king. Hatred makes a person a slave, but love sets us free from selfishness and enables us to reign like kings. Love enables us to obey the word of God and treat people as God commands us to do. We obey His Law, not out of fear, but out of love." (Wiersbe, p.63)

2a). How do you see a poor man? How does God see a poor man? How can you see people through the eyes of Christ? On what basis do we tend to judge people? What are some excuses we hear people give to justify disobedience to God's clear commands?

b). "Christian love does not mean that I must like a person and agree with him on every-thing.... Christian love means treating others the way God has treated me. It is an act of will, not an emotion that I try to manufacture. The motive is to glorify God. The means is the power of the Spirit within. As I act in love toward another, I may find myself drawn more and more to him, and I may see in him (through Christ) qualities that before were hidden to me." (Wiersbe, p.71)

Think of someone you do not particularly like in church. How can you possibly love him or her?

James 2:10-13: License and Liberty

3a).What will Christian believers NOT be judged on (Jn 5:24; Rm 8:1)?

b).What WILL Christian believers be judged on by God:

i. Rm 14:10-13;

ii. 2 Cor. 5:9-10)

iii. Mt 5:21-26; 33-37;

iv. Mt. 12:34-37

v. Col 3:22-25

vi. Jas 2:13

c).One reality test of our faith is how we treat others. Can you pass this test?

Discipleship Pointers

- It is a sad fact that the church has often been guilty of partiality and discrimination. Dr Martin Luther King observed that the most segregated time of the week in the Southern States of USA was Sunday morning.

- Discrimination and partiality may take different forms in modern Singapore and at ORPC. Do you make distinctions in how you treat different people? Are you prepared to accept the challenge to offer unconditional love to others, including those who are (frankly) difficult to love? Can you love them to reflect the unconditional love which God has extended to you?

- All of our attempts to abide by God's laws must be measured against what James calls the 'Royal Law' – the law of love. Think of all your dealings with others. Can you honestly say that they are all governed by the guiding principle of love?

- Remember "Mercy triumphs over judgment" Do not judge others – that is for God. But be merciful.

Group/Family Moment

Think of a welfare home you and your group/family can visit. One of our Small Groups has made it their regular project to show love by "adopting" a group of boys. Would you like to consider prayerfully with your group/family, doing something like this?

JAMES 3:1-12: TAMING THE TONGUE

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

Introduction

Flaming' is a term that we apply to intemperate emails but it has a wider application. As James says in v6, the tongue can be like the flame that ignites and destroys a forest. Vv3-5 speak of the tongue's power which is inordinate to its size while vv6-7 give a vivid comment on its destructive potential and vv8-12 expose the weakness of the two-tongued person. All that drives us back to the principle in v2 and its application to teachers (v1). Mastery of the tongue is a key to control of our whole person. What sins of the tongue are common within the church today? What practical things can we do to discourage ourselves and others from slander, gossip, lies and such like?

The tongue needs to be checked against boasting, corrupting, and cursing:

1. Tongue-Control (vv. 1-4)

a). From vv1-2 and 22, what issue did James see among the readers?

b). Discuss how control over one's speech is a measure of one's holiness (v2)?

c). In mentioning horses and ships, what did the author believe about the tongue (vv3-4)?

Reflect:

Choose one of the scenarios below to discern what you should say. How far are you able to do this on a daily basis? Keep in mind 1 Pet 4:11a

Scenario A

It is 8 p.m. You are supposed to have a pot-luck dinner at your home with your good friend. You are hungry and the food you prepared is getting cold. Your friend arrives at 8:15 p.m. with groceries and apologises he has not cooked earlier. Then he starts to prepare the food in your kitchen. It does not look like dinner will start before 9 p.m. His spouse looks annoyed.

What you might be tempted to say...

What you should be thinking...

What you should say to him instead...

Scenario B

You are in the office, rushing out a report. Someone from your ministry team rings you, the team leader. You ask whether you can call her after work. She says she wishes to speak right then, and then mentions she does not wish to continue serving with immediate effect "because God spoke and told me to move to another church." She suggests another person to take over.

What you might be tempted to say...

What you should be thinking...

What you instead should say to her...

2. The tongue corrupts (vv. 5-6)

a) . In v5, why is control of the tongue necessary?

b). V6 speaks of the nature of the tongue and also the repercussion of careless speech. Rephrase the verse using your own words

Ponder:

Share a recent event which highlights to you the need to be careful of what is said

3. The tongue praises and curses (vv7-11)

a). Continuing from v6, what is reemphasised in vv7,8 concerning the tongue?

b). Discuss how the use of the tongue reflects on the speaker's destiny in vv10-12. Do you agree?

Consider:

If the Bible is clear on the judgement for consistent misuse of the tongue, how does this lesson encourage you to choose your words well? See also 1 Pet 3:10-12.

Discipleship Pointers

Believers exercise care in what they say (and write). The first segment highlights the fact that one can control what one says. Secondly, the absence of control leads to the corrupting effect of the tongue left unchecked. Third, such an uncontrolled tongue may still praise God on the surface but will lead its master to damnation.

James encourages us all to be rich in faith (2:5), such that all we do demonstrate our exercise of faith biblically and consistently (eg. 1:22). The driving force for change in what we say should be our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, not for the sake of the supposed virtue of saying less bad things.

The Bible requires us to control what we say and we are all reminded the kind of damage an uncontrolled tongue can inflict. We dare not be careless with what we say thinking that we can always reverse the damage when we often cannot. If we indulge by having our say and let our speech go unchecked, we can reach the point of no return when the logical destiny for us is certain hell (3:6).

Group/Family Moment

Create paper trays or makeshift boxes (such as from an empty tissue box) with each family member's name on the outside. If there are things said which are considered offensive or discouraging to a family member, a "vote" is cast by the affected listener against the offending family member, noting the date and time. After one week, tally how many votes each family member gets.

Discuss for each family member what is observed about him or her, providing an opportunity for the offending family member to explain. Where appropriate, offending members of the family should apologise for the sharp words spoken. How did you fare?

JAMES 4:1-12: DRAW NEAR TO GOD

GENERAL SURVEY

Topic:

Key Verse:

Main Person/s:

Key Ideas and Questions:

Introduction

It's sometimes said that the world has invaded the church rather than the church conquering the world. This world invasion is seen in lives lived in which we are little different from the worst of worldly humanity. James' point is not to reprimand the world but rather to call the church to submit to God (v7); resist the devil (v7); lead a pure life (v8); grieve in sincere sorrow over sins (v9) and humble self before the Lord (v10). All these in cultivating God's friendship while disowning the world's (v3). In what ways do we see the seductive pull of the world in our lives individually and corporately? How can we guard against these?

1. How not to pray (vv1-3)

We have no specific information concerning the people to whom James was writing. However, the nature of James' questions enables us to deduce quite a lot. List all the characteristics of the (Christian!) community to which he was writing.

James gives two reasons why they don't get what they want. What is the root cause why these people haven't received what they want?

However, it seems that sometimes they DO ask. Do we expect God to give us absolutely any-thing we might ask for?

Does God listen to our requests? If we don't always get what we ask for, what might be the reason? What are your motives when you make requests to God?

2. 'Adultery' (vv4-6)

Do you think the word 'adulterous' is being used literally or metaphorically here (v4)? The rest of the sentence gives a hint as to what the word means here in this context.

The term 'adultery' is often used in the Bible to describe unfaithfulness to God (e.g. Jer 13:26-27). What does it mean to be adulterous in this sense? The next sentence (v4b) describes this sort of adulterer – fill in the spaces:

Anyone who chooses to be a _____ of the world becomes an _____ of God.

Give three examples of 'friendship with the world' – try to think of things that are particularly prevalent here in Singapore:

V5 is perhaps better rendered by other translations than the NIV. The NRSV is easier to understand – “God yearns jealously for the spirit that He has made to dwell in us.” (Note: Although James tells us ‘Scripture says’, his quotation does not match any specific Old Testament passage and is more likely a general summary of the Old Testament understanding that God is jealous for our worship – see e.g. Ex 34:14)

3. Instructions for submission to God (vv7-10)

James gives us a series of commandments. Suggest something which each of these could mean in the life of a 21st century Christian here in Singapore:

Submit to God _____

Resist the Devil _____

Come near to God _____

Wash your hands _____

Purify your hearts _____

Grieve, mourn and wail _____

Change you laughter to mourning _____

... and your joy to gloom _____

Humble yourselves before God _____

4. Pure speech does not condemn (vv11-12)

1. ‘Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it’ (v11). What does this mean? Discuss.

2. What reasons can you suggest for not slandering our brothers/sisters in Christ? If we slander what are the implications for our relationship with (i) God, (ii) other Christians, (iii) the world in general?

Discipleship Pointers

- How do you pray? Do you have enough faith to pray with confidence for the things you need?

- ... or do you pray for the wrong things with the wrong motives? God is unlikely to answer prayers for our own enrichment or to boost our own ego and self-importance.

- Are you devoted and faithful to God, or have you become an enemy of God by committing ‘adultery’ – loving the world instead of God?

- Are you willing to submit every aspect of your life to God by cultivating habits of godly living which are pleasing to God? – James provides a useful checklist in vv7-10.

- Beware of talk. Do not speak evil of others. Do not judge others – judgement is reserved for God. Slanderous talk can wreck our relationship with God just as much as sinful actions.

Group/Family Moment

- In your group or family tell the other members of (i) something you’ve prayed for which God has provided and (ii) something which God has not provided.

- Every one of us is at risk of falling in love with the world and worldly things. Tell your group/family of one area where you think you need help and ask your group to pray for you.