

(Introduction to 'James')

This morning ... We're going to leave, our OT leaders  
with their strengths & weaknesses ...

And turn to the letter of James ~ near the end of the NT.

James ~ was not a trained theologian ... like Paul.  
But he's known ~ for his strong moral earnestness,  
And his simple call ... to repentance ... to action  
and to a positive ... Christian lifestyle.

In James, we have a **teaching letter**,  
But ~ not a narrative story ...

So we'll use various ... **Illustration stories** ...

To **clarify** the meaning ...

And to help us **remember** ~ what James is teaching !

I know, you live a long way ~ from Mission Bay, or St. Heliers,  
 But in your ... **mind's eye** ... come with me ...  
 To ... Regatta Day ... on Auckland Harbour,  
 It's ... at the end of January ... every year.

**The day** dawns fine & breezy ... there's Boaties everywhere.  
 Studying the course ~ checking their sails,  
 Checking their safety gear ~ Excitement fills the air ~  
 "Quick ! ... get in position for the start !  
 Now ~ Wa-a-a-i-t ... for the gun .... BANG ! We're off"

Each boat ~ has the **wind** ~ to move it.  
 A **course** to follow ... and **someone** to steer.

**And then !** ... there's **this cork** ! It's at the Regatta too !  
 But, it has **no** direction ... **no** course ... **no** motive power.  
 It just goes ... any way ... the wind & waves push it.

**How sad it is** ~ when you meet a person ~ just like this **cork** !  
**Drifting** ... **without** purpose ... **without** direction !  
 And **without** faith ~ in the Living God !

But even a cork can be given a sail ... & a centreboard ... (do it)  
 So now ~ it has some direction ~ to it's movement,  
 But there's no way to steer it ! OK ... we can add a rudder,

But with no 'hand' on the tiller ... nothing's gained !  
 The wind, & the waves are still in control !

Now we have a picture ...  
of purely **human solutions** ~ to our problems,  
But ... just the ability to think & act ~ is not enough either !

Let's keep the **theme** ~ but change the illustration ...  
Take a healthy **young man** ... a nice, **new** fibreglass boat,  
A fine day ~ with a good breeze ... & what happens ?  
He **capsizes** !

Successful sailing ~ requires an understanding ...  
Of **How** to trim the sails ... **How** to sail ~ **into** the wind,  
& **how** to turn & sail ~ **with** the wind.  
Not just **knowledge** ... but also **wisdom** ~  
In **how to apply** ... **that knowledge** !

**Wisdom** ~ is an important theme ~ as we start our new series  
Looking into the book of **James**:

So let's start, by reading: [from Chpt.1...vs1-12](#)

1<sup>stly</sup> ... **who is ... our writer James** ?

The most widely accepted answer is:

He's the Lord's brother. [Listen to: Mat.13.from v.53](#)

As the Church developed after the Resurrection ...

Various leaders came to the fore ~ in different locations.

**Stephen** ~ **Peter** ~ **Philip** ~ **James** ~ & a bit later: **Paul**.

So ... how does **James**: describe **himself** ?

**As... a slave of God ~ and of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

He's writing ~ to Jewish Christians  
Who'd fled ... from the persecution in Jerusalem,  
And settled ... in other parts of the Empire.

But in each congregation ...  
There'd be a mixture ~ of both Jews & Gentiles.  
So this letter ~ doesn't **exclude** anyone, it applies to both.

Those who showed faith ... (like the faith of Abraham)  
And accepted **Jesus** ~ as **God's Son**, & the **Messiah**,

Were **all** part of the newly developing Church.  
Regardless ~ of whether they were **born**, Jews or Gentiles !

**Reading vs.2,3,4. + 1Peter 4. vs.12,13.**

Both James & Peter ... are referring to **persecution**,  
From family ~ friends ~ & employers.  
Even today ~ in an 'Orthodox' Jewish family,  
Becoming a Christian ! ... can result ...

In you being turned out of the house ~ and shunned !

Some **Orthodox Jews** will even hold a kind of 'funeral service'  
And say ... "**our son ... or our daughter ... is dead**" !

James writes to encourage such people ...  
To 'keep going' ... and not 'give up'  
And, **Perseverance** in our **faith** ~ is just as important today !

**Perseverance & Maturity** ... go hand in hand ...  
In developing our character !

Our '**Maturity**'... can't be **bought** in a 'Garage Sale' !  
It grows & develops ... when we're under stress.  
But, we won't show our Maturity ~ by being ...  
**'Pig-headed & stubborn'!**

Our "Key verse"...this morning ~ is **v.5**

**If you need wisdom,  
If you want to know, what God wants you to do,  
Ask Him ... and He will gladly tell you.  
He will not resent your asking.**

We all **need** wisdom ... but, we need to recognise,  
That our wisdom ~ will be seen by others ...  
In where we place our **values** !

James is looking for both **commitment, & evaluation,**  
That will show us ... **We really do need, God's help.**

A young man walked past some shops, & prayed:  
"Shall I go into this shop ~ or the next one ?  
Shall I buy the white shirt ~ or the blue one ?"  
He was asking for ~ **precise** instructions !

But, those questions ~ are **not about wisdom, or guidance.**  
They're about ... personal preferences !

**Maturity** only grows, **when we deal with** our daily problems.

So ... when we ask God for wisdom,

Does He only provide it ~ to deal with Christian things ?

No ! ... God cares about **every part** of our life.

But He does expect us ~ to use the brain he gave us...

And **apply the maturity** ... He's been **developing in us** !

So let's ask the question ... **what is 'Wisdom'** ?

We've all met people ~ with a head full of knowledge,

And sometimes even ~ a degree or two ~ who repeatedly...  
make dumb decisions ~ dumb choices ~ showing no wisdom !

We need **wisdom**, to APPLY our knowledge, to each situation.  
Wisdom, is about our choices ... & how we arrive at them.

God, gives each of us ~ the freedom to choose !

But, with that freedom ~ comes the responsibility ...

to make **good** choices ~ **wise** choices ~ **thoughtful** choices

**v5.** Says ... *God will not resent us asking for wisdom,  
not even ~ when we ask repeatedly.*

Anne & I know someone ~ who often asks for advice ...

But what they really want ~ is confirmation of their own plans.

Unfortunately ... we often meet people ~ with that attitude,  
To **God's** guidance !

‘Lord ~ please **bless my plans...**

I’m much too busy ~ to even think about ~ any others’ !

**Read vs.6,7,8.**

Some people don’t think **their life**,  
is important enough ...

for God to really care about **them** !

So they don’t expect God, to answer their prayer for wisdom !

They’re just like that cork, floating in the sea, at the Regatta.

Blown in any direction ...the wind & waves push it.

An older translation ~ concludes v.8, with ...

**A double minded man is unstable ~ in all, his ways.**

Now that’s a serious warning ! But what does it mean ?

Back in the 1950’s ... the politician **Walter Nash**,

Was asked for **his views** ~ on a rather difficult issue ...

and not wanting ... to annoy either side ...

He said ... **“I’m ...Uh.. I’m neither for ~ nor against”**

The Press ~ quoted this against him ... for years !

But, **double minded** ~ *can also mean* ~ both ‘for’ & ‘against’

Most **Charities**, have great compassion for the people they serve  
but then pay miserable wages, to their own staff.

Now that’s got to be ...**contradictory** !

But to be fair ...this attitude is actually encouraged,  
by some of their donors ... who say:

*When I make a gift ~ I want **all my gift** ~ to go to the cause,  
I don't want any of **my money**...used for administration !*

But ... he wants to be kept informed, of how his money is spent  
And someone to answer the phone when he rings,  
And a tax receipt ~ to claim a third of it back !

But **donations** ~ are the **only source** of finance, the charity has  
To cover the costs ~ of running everything !

James says: When we vacillate, between being for, & against.  
And sometimes ~ even try to be **both** ...

We become **unstable** ~ **unreliable** ~ and **inconsistent** !  
And it's clear evidence ...that **we're not using**  
the Godly wisdom ~ we've been praying for !

**Read vs.9,10.** Is James suddenly changing the subject ?

In the churches he's writing to ...  
There were, both **wealthy merchants**, and **slaves**

The poor slave... *is tempted to think* ~ that **wisdom** is futile.  
His life is so controlled by his master ~  
That God's wisdom, has no place ...Or ...so it seems !

While the rich merchant ~ *is tempted to think* ...  
That God's wisdom, isn't really necessary !

He can trust the human wisdom ~ that's made him rich already.

It's not hard to imagine ~ the **polarising** of these two groups

But ~ **the ground is level** ~ at the foot of the Cross !

And financial assets ~ or ~ a lack of them ...

**Should not** create a "Pecking order" in any Church !

How many of us, poorer people ~ wish we were rich !

But ... how many rich people ~ wish they had their health,  
Or family harmony, or something else, that money can't buy !

James says: The **poor** Christian is '**uplifted**' in Christ ...

While the **rich** Christian is '**brought down**' ...  
to being equal, with his brothers & sisters.

Later ~ **in ch.2** ~ He'll develop this theme, a lot further.

Sometimes ... problems arise in churches ...

When '**the rich**' ~ (who are used to being in charge at work) ~  
Are asked to manage the church !

Some ... find it nearly impossible ...to consider,  
or even listen properly ...to another person's point of view

In **v.9**, James says, **the slave can stand tall** ...as a child of God  
And ~ as a brother ~ or sister ... in Christ,

Because, he has a new **status** ~ that he's never had before ...

And it can't be taken from him !

He now ~ has access to God ~ at any time,

Without the discrimination ~ he often receives from others.

And he can freely ask for God's help & wisdom,

As many times a day ... as he needs to.

Without any fear ... of angering his Heavenly Father !

The rich man or woman ...

Also has a new **status** ~ as a child of God ...

Which doesn't depend on financial fortunes ~ **or misfortunes.**

The rich man can rejoice ~ his new status, is **secure & eternal.**

In fact ... it's the best investment ... he's ever made !

But ... it still requires some **humility** ... because...

He's not achieved his salvation ~ by his own cleverness !

And ~ like everyone else ~ He's subject to human frailty.

James doesn't say ... *It's a **virtue** to be rich,*

Nor that ... *It's a **virtue** to be poor,*

He says ... Tests and trials ~ will come to both.

Our last verse is **v12. (read)** ... James has already explained:  
**Trials**, will grow our **faith** & bring **maturity** to our **character.**

Results that apply to us ... **here and now.**

In **v.12** he adds **another dimension** ... a reward at the end.  
 His readers, would all be familiar with the **Olympic Games**  
 The most popular events ... were the running races ...  
 From the short sprints ... right up ...to the **marathon**.

But ~ to be an **athlete** ~ & **participate** in the Games,  
 you had to ... **Keep** to the rules,  
                   **Keep** to the course ...  
 and **Complete** the whole distance.

If you **won** your race ...  
 You were given 'a crown' of **laurel** leaves ...  
 It was called ~ **a crown of victory**.

At weddings & celebrations ~ you were sometimes given  
 A circlet of **flowers** to wear ~ called ~ **a crown of joy**.

And ~ to the person chosen to be the **Emperor**,  
 they gave...**A crown of authority**.  
 Now the **laurel leaves**, were made of **gold** !

So that's ... A crown of **victory** ~  
                   A crown of **joy** ~  
                   &... A crown of **authority** ~  
 But... James ~ **supersedes** all of these with ...

**A Crown of Life** ... an eternal reward ~ promised by God,  
 Not just to a **few** winners ~ but to **all those**, who love God.

At the beginning, James made a rather **startling** statement:

Whenever trouble comes your way,  
Let it be ... an **opportunity for joy** ...  
For when your faith is tested,  
Your endurance has a chance to grow.

So...we must look at our trials ~ **through the eyes of faith** !

Otherwise ~ the trials that are meant to make us ...**better**,  
Can actually make us ...**bitter** !

God wants us to show **patience** in our trials ...

But ~ it's not just a **passive acceptance**, of our circumstances  
It's an **active response** ...with a desire to know God's will.

However ... God doesn't use force ...  
So He won't build our character, without our co-operation.  
Because He only works with ... a surrendered will.

God wants our life to have **faith** & **trust** & **joy** ...**here** & **now**.

While waiting for God's ~ **Crown of eternal life** ~

... at the end of the race !