

# A FAITH THAT MAKES US LESS JUDGEMENTAL



Greetings my brothers and sisters in Christ. It's always so encouraging for me, to be at church with you all, as we live together, as companions on the journey of life!

Today is the 17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost and I pray today's message, as we continue to delve into the letter of St James with today's topic of '*Developing a faith that makes us less judgemental.*' will healthily challenge some of our attitudes we may have gathered over the years!

*Let us pray.*

*Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love. Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Don't you love it when, the 'penny drops' as the saying goes, when the Holy Spirit gently nudges you to rethink some of the misconceptions one might have developed over *ones long life!!!*

Such is the case for me as we continue our study on the book of James.

To start with, I discovered some interesting background to the book of James, from Church history, as follows:-

1. According to Josephus (Jewish Antiquities 20.197–203), James, the brother of Jesus, was killed in 62 CE, during the high priesthood of Ananus. Those who hold to traditional authorship date the epistle to sometime before 62 CE, in the forties or fifties, making it one of the earliest writings of the New Testament.
2. From my NRSV study Bible, the introduction states: This letter of James was accepted as scripture by the church in Alexandria in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, by the Western church in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and by the Syrian church in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Thereafter it has remained in the NT canon of all churches, though at the time of the Reformation Martin Luther questioned its status because it appeared to contradict Paul's teaching on justification by faith, which Luther held to be of central importance.
3. On a personal note my Kairos experiences continue to reinforce the message from the book of James to live a life of meeting people at wherever they are at and accepting them. Or as the saying goes "*learn to love like a teddy bear, with arms wide open and eyes closed.*"

So now onto our passages for today.

An interesting observation of Christianity, is to know that ours is not the only generation of Christians to think that belief is simply a matter of the words we use, and that it doesn't need to

affect our 'ordinary' in any way. Here, James is writing to a Christian church that was, apparently, just like Churches today.

The people who James is writing to, are convinced enough of the claims of the gospel to call themselves Christians, and they meet regularly with others. But they don't see this is a matter that affects their fundamental understanding of the 'world around them'.

James finds this almost incredible. His readers seem to be viewing faith as a kind of insurance policy. *Have we ever thought like that? I know I have.*

- We probably need it as part of a sensible attempt to keep unpleasant reality at bay, or
- In case of sickness or accident, or
- If you can relate to the 'hatch-em, match-em the despatch-em' form of Christianity, like I'll attend church when it's convenient! or
- It's nice to know that God is on our side!
- And the list goes on....

And surely as part of the point of any insurance policy, it allows us to carry on our normal life without any worries about the consequences of our actions?

So we have James's congregation, who:

- Still like rich people better than poor people,
- Clean people better than dirty people,
- Well people better than sick people, because, after all, who doesn't?
- Nice people better than those different to us by colour or creed,
- We the good people who haven't been to prison.

*James' alarming answer is God doesn't.*

God doesn't have favourites.

Praise God that He is blind to our normal measures of society.

You see, God doesn't seem to notice accents, or cost out people's clothes and treat them accordingly. God has absolutely no need to keep in with the rich and famous, or to find favour with the influential.

After all, God is God.

One of the worrying consequences of the above is the possibility that God doesn't realize where He belongs in *our* carefully planned life.

God might not be aware that He is a fail-safe mechanism, to be invoked when *we* are up against something that we can't cope with on our own.

God might, indeed, believe that He is in the way, of the truth and the life, and that our attempts to make Him fit *our way, our truth and our life* are at best touchingly misplaced and at worst, we could say, completely ridiculous!

James says, *Faith* changes the way we live, in that extremely unpleasant, black and white way of his! We might feel tempted, at this point, to turn to that nice St Paul, who really understands about the importance of faith, and doesn't go on droning on about to do things as well. Try reading Romans 6!

*Yes, there is no escaping the New Testament conviction that faith is a commitment to a changed way of life, because it is a commitment to trying to see the world with the eyes of God!*

This has enormous benefits for us personally, since God is understanding and forgiving beyond what we could ever expect or deserve.

But the downside is that he is equally concerned about others. We are not his favourites. We must try to see as we are seen, James says in verse ***13 For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.***

We cannot expect God to use one standard of judgment on us, if that is not the standard of judgment that we are using on anyone else.

Probably, however, we should give ourselves permission not to be always certain about God's standards. There are some fairly consistent clues in the New Testament and, sadly, suspicion of the lure of wealth is one of them.

Over and over again the Gospels show Jesus interacting with those whom most societies consider marginal.

The Gospels suggest that there is something about being an insider, comfortable in the world we live in, that actually makes it harder to hear God.

If the world is basically treating us in a kind and gentle way; in a way that does not hurt anybody, then we tend to forget that its standards may not be God's.

Why would we want to be reminded of something that might end up making our life uncomfortable?

When St James says, 'Beware of a faith that has not visibly changed your life', do we ask ourselves, is he speaking words we have to hear, but seldom want to?

**Amen**

## PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How might 2:1-13 relate to 1:26-27?
2. What are ways today we might be tempted to show partiality or favouritism?
3. What are a few reasons given in James 2:5-8 for why we shouldn't show favouritism?
4. Read Matt. 5:2-12. James refers a few times to the poor and lowly, which could be financial but could also (partly) be a posture of the heart. How does Jesus' beatitudes in Matthew 5—alongside the book of James—give us a different view of the kind of people and character Jesus desires for His kingdom?
5. What are ways God has been merciful, gracious, and compassionate to you?
6. What are ways you can reflect God's mercy, grace, and compassion to others?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read James 1:9-11; 2:1-7; 5:1-6.  
What are some of James's warnings against earthly riches? What encouragements does he offer to those who aren't wealthy?
2. Read Mark 12:28-31.  
Why are both commands Jesus gives essential to our discipleship? Are there ways we might prioritize the first command (love God) but ignore the second (love others)?
3. James offers us a lot of instruction for how to live and the importance of a faith that works. How does this section in 2:8-13 assure us that our obedience can never be perfect enough to save us or give us a right standing before God? Why should this be a reminder of our need for the grace and salvation only Jesus can provide?
4. Why should a life of showing mercy, grace, and compassion mark a believer in Christ (2:13)? How does this call to be merciful—as those who have received mercy—relate to what was written in 1:26-2:12?
5. Where do you need encouragement, accountability, or prayer to live out 2:1-13?