

# Induction of James Dancer – Hold Up Christ

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, it's a very good morning from me, and it was a very good morning from them, wasn't it? I'm not a member of the leadership team here. I'm just a member. But I believe I am an older! And I believe James is a younger man. And I want to have a look at 1 Timothy 4 as an older man talks to a younger man in the text. So if you keep your Bibles open at page 1192, that would be very, very good. Much appreciated. Let's ask for God's help. Thank you, Father, for the text of Scripture. Thank you that your Word is a living Word. By your Holy Spirit, will you make it live in our hearts this morning, we pray, and James's in particular. In Jesus' name, Amen. Well, it's been a very, very good summer of sport. Have you noticed that? The cricket. Didn't we do well? The golf. The women's football. Wasn't that fabulous? And recently, even the men's football. Now, we all know that the aim of sport is to win, isn't it? But to do that, think of all the training that has gone in. Think of the healthy diets that have been eaten.

Think of the times of going to the gym and pumping iron. Think of the practicing, the practicing, and the practicing. And yet studying tactics. All in order to keep focus on the day of the match and the great prize at the end. But then, after the bus tour, it's back to training again. And more training and more training. It's like that, you know, in Christian ministry. If you want to be a good pastor, you need to be well nourished and to train well. Look at verse 6 in the text.

If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the Christian faith. Look at verse 7. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales. Rather, train yourself to be godly. And being an assistant minister, or as we used to call it when we put it around the other way around, minister's ass, being an assistant minister is an excellent training ground. I know, I've been there. The training and developing, in fact, never, never ends.

Now, I know James, Johan, address you all as church, but I hope you won't mind. I want to talk to one person this morning. I want to talk to James. I'm very happy for you all to listen in. In fact, I'd be very happy to do that. But no mucking around in the back rows. Is that all right?

James, as you know, life in first century Ephesus was pretty un-Christian. It was a pagan society. And Timothy is sent there to be a good minister of Jesus Christ. Look at the phrase in verse 6.

[ 3 : 16 ] If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of, notice that Christ is put first, his title, a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you followed. Timothy is to instruct the believers at Ephesus and he's to evangelize the unbelievers. There is clearly ungodliness in this city and it overflows into the Christian church. People teaching what we would call untruths, false truths, non-truths. Timothy is to teach both the truth and proper conduct. Just come and look back at chapter 3 and verse 14, for example.

Although I hope to come to you soon, says old Paul, I am writing to you with these instructions so that if I'm delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. Teach proper conduct as well as proper truth. Look at 4.13. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Now the danger they face at Ephesus is the same danger as I think we face here in this country. It's a danger of being deceived by semi-truth, partial truth, not full truth, which I'm going to call, like Francis Schaeffer did, true truth, but bits of truth, your truth, my truth, some bits of truth, but not whole truth. That's what he says, doesn't he, at the beginning of chapter 4. The Spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

Such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created

to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. Now as Timothy does his job well, he will be seen as a worked example of a godly pastor. He's in the middle of a corrupt and muddled world and he must show both the signs of truth and the dangers of capitulating to the society around him. He must have the joy of holding on and proclaiming true truth in the midst of false truths. And I think that is your task too, James.

Pastors are here both to point out error on the one hand and teach the truth on the other. We're to model godliness, persuading the ungodly to follow Christ. So here are your instructions from 1 Timothy 4, from an older man to a younger man. Three things to say to you. Here's the first. Look after yourself.

In the light of the legalists and liars that work here at Ephesus, Timothy is to look after himself. That phrase in verse 7 is worth underlying. Train yourself to be godly. Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise to both the present life and the life to come. And then when he gets down to verse 12 he says, set an example to the believers.

[ 7 : 04 ] Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Look after yourself. Although this is a badly messed up world, with much deception thrown at us by Satan, what God has made is good. That's important to notice that in verse 4, isn't it? Physical training is of some value. Godliness has value in all things, holding promise both for the present and the life to come. And verse 4, everything God created is good.

Nothing is to be rejected if it's received with thanksgiving. It's consecrated by the word of God and prayer. God's world is a good world. And God's word is a good word. So continue to follow the good teaching and therefore be a good minister of Jesus Christ. And I think you can only do that if at verse 16 at the end you watch your life and doctrine closely. So look after yourself, my brother. Look after yourself. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Now in this part of the world where we live here in Farnham, we don't have to persuade people to look after their bodies. We love our gyms, we love our golf courses, we love our swimming pools, we love our cricket, we love our football and our rugby pitches. But we don't have many places for training in godliness here. That's what the church offers. That's what you and I offer. Training in godliness. And that means understanding the world in which we live. Relish in the goodness of this world and avoid its wickedness. Here in Farnham, we also love our coffee and our coffee shops. And we multiply them along with second hand shops and estate agents. But we love them. We love them. Try them out. I hope the church will pay you enough money so that you can go out for coffee. Go out regularly. Take friends for coffee. Talk over coffee.

That's where much of the gospel work is done in the coffee shops. As you talk and understand other people, you learn about life. Learn to listen. To listen well. Preferably to the person you're talking to rather than the conversation at the table next door. But it's not bad to listen in to the conversation next door because you find out a lot about life, don't you?

Look after your soul. Look after your soul. Read, read, read really well. Find out what's going on in the world. I've already read a couple of articles in the newspaper this morning. Try and do that. Weave into your prayers and into your thinking the world in which we live, the town in which we live, and our country, and bring it to God in prayer. Read wider than your own default position. Read a different kind of paper, for example. Think. Think and ask questions. Try and understand how other people understand life and how the gospel would apply to them, how you would apply the gospel to them. Look after your soul. Be godly in your thinking as well as in your speaking and living.

[ 10 : 40 ] But make sure you feed on God's word, my brother. It's the truest of truth. There's no truth better than God's truth. Some pastors read the Bible daily with a personal Bible reading plan. Others use the passages that they're going to speak on for their own devotions. There's no right or wrong way of how to read the Bible.

Just develop healthy habits and try different ones. Read good theology books, both new and old. But also read stuff that holds an opposite viewpoint.

And if you don't read the actual books, at least read the reviews. Understand the world we live in. Understand the gospel and understand yourself. Don't be scared to ask.

Ask, ask, ask, ask, ask. Jesus asked more questions than he ever, ever answered. Look after your soul. That's the first point. Look after yourself.

Secondly, teach the Bible. Look at 13. Until I come, Timothy is told by Paul, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.

[11:55] That's why I keep repeating it. The public reading of Scripture, preaching and teaching. That's the whole gambit. This is what we call a Bible-based ministry.

Because we believe, don't we, that as the Bible is taught faithfully, it will show up the myths and the false teaching of this current world, and it will point us to the Lord Jesus.

Jane, you must carve out time to quality time to immerse yourself in the Scriptures. You must. It's demanding.

I'll throw that ball back to you. It's distracting me. Build up a library of commentaries, a good library of commentaries that will last a lifetime.

But also, listen to good expositions from other people. People who can handle the Word of God well and apply it. My hero at the moment is Tim Keller.

[12:55] Listen to Keller on a passage of Scripture. Listen to what I've done the last couple of years, the Bible readings from Keswick. They're brilliant. In fact, it would be excellent to join a local preaching group.

We used to have some around here. You submit your talk before you preach, not afterwards, and you get valuable feedback. You say, these are the things I'm going to say from this passage. What do you all think? All of us who open up Scriptures are learners.

That's what the word disciple means, doesn't it? So we constantly strive to improve. We ask for feedback all the time. Don't be too embarrassed to ask for help. Ask older preachers what the commentaries are that they use, that they find helpful.

Ask regular listeners for your feedback. And to all of us here, we'd love to tell James what we think of his sermons, wouldn't we? And so we should. So we should.

Now notice that little phrase at the beginning of 13, devote yourself. Devote yourself to these things. In other words, it's a task which is very demanding. It needs all your energy.

[14:01] Preaching isn't the hard work, the standing up. It's the prep work. It's the hours and hours of sweat that we put in to work at the text before we stand up and speak.

It might look very easy standing up and saying it like this and having three headings and they all are alliterated. Fabulous. But the work that's gone in has to be the text digested. It's a bit like a good meal.

I don't know if you know, but I like a good meal. I'm very fond of a good meal. And I'm married to someone who can feed me brilliantly. So if you haven't found a wife like that, have a look around for someone who can feed you well.

When the good meal is served, served on the plate, it looks superb, doesn't it? It looks excellent. It looks obvious, straightforward. It looks appetizing.

It's beautifully laid out. Work hard at your talks. Work hard at reading the Bible publicly. It's the word of God that does the work.

[15:05] You and I, we're merely table waiters serving the meal. So in summary, watch your life and doctrine closely. That's verse 16.

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Because as you feed on God's word, so you are to preach it. Be diligent in these matters, Paul says. Give yourself wholly to them, he says.

In verse 15. And this, this is a huge but. The word of God is not the ultimate end.

We often think that, we preachers. We've done our work. We've spent time in the text. Hours and hours and hours. For me, it used to be two days to prepare a sermon. It's a bit less now. About a day and a half.

But I still better work at it. Work hard. And if I'm not careful, the expounding of the text becomes the end result. It's not the end result. It's a means to an end.

[16:04] We are to take people to Christ. We're to help one another find salvation in Jesus Christ. So look again at 16. Be diligent in these matters.

Give yourself wholly to them. So people may watch your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. persevere in them. Because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Can you see that salvific comment in the last verse? You will save both yourself and your hearers. So you look after yourself.

You teach the Bible. And thirdly, you hold up Christ. Here's the reason to look after yourself. Here's the reason to teach the Bible well. This is the nugget of that trustworthy saying in the middle of the

text.

James and I, by the way, met and we've gone over this text together. He knows what I'm going to say. But you don't. In the middle of the text, I think it's the nugget that opens up the chapter. Look at verse 10.

[17:11] Verse 10. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. There are a number of trustworthy sayings that Paul has. This is a trustworthy saying. That is why we labour and strive.

Because we've put our hope in the living God, who is the saviour of all people, and especially those who believe. See that? Jesus Christ, who is God, is the world's saviour and our living hope.

And because of Jesus, we work hard. We labour and we strive, he says. We labour and we strive. Why? Because our hope is in Christ.

Oh yes, there's a human role. That's true. We've got to put the hard graft in. We've got to live a godly life. We've got to prepare our talks. It's hard work. And churches recognise that. That's why they pay us to study and to be diligent.

But there must also be surely a divine role. After all, the living God is the saviour. See the connection? This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

[18:16] It's why we labour and strive, because we put our hope in the living God, who is the saviour of all people. And that salvific comment at the end. We're leading people to Christ the saviour.

There's a divine role. Yet our task is to show it's true. God's task is to enable salvation to occur. He takes our feeble words, and he drives home their truths, so that hard hearts are softened, so that those who think they're their own saviours are so changed that Christ becomes their saviour.

And for this, we rely on God to do his work by his spirit through his word. That's why prayer is vital. If we want to see God at work, changing people, making them more godly, making them like Christ, then we must, must pray.

And we must call on one another to pray. We'll achieve almost nothing without prayer. Our words will be mere hot air. So here is a task, I think, that everyone can join in on.

Can't we? We can all pray together. The secret of a well-functioning church is its prayer life. So may I plead with all of us this morning to give priority to prayer, like we did last Wednesday, because James and Johan depend on our prayers.

[19:44] We have put our hope in the living God, says Paul. See that in verse 10? We have put our hope in the living God. He's the rescuer.

He's the saviour of this world, and especially of believers. It's because of Christ. It's because of his perfect life. It's because of his extraordinary death.

It's because of his stunning resurrection. Salvation is a work of God, carried out by Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit. My brother, we're totally dependent on God.

We work hard at communicating God's truth, because God went to extraordinary lengths to rescue us. Much as though we're in the preaching business, we're actually in the rescuing business, rescuing people from hell.

We won't be judged for our eloquence or our brilliant insight or our very clever theological ideas.

We'll be judged by our life, by our godliness, by whether we presented Christ to people.

[20:49] And whoever faulty we may be, the question will be, did you lift up the Lord Jesus? And if we did lift him up, did we expect God to draw people to him?

A famous preacher once said, I can put up with bad preaching from others as long as they lift up Jesus. I can put up with bad preaching as long as they lift up Jesus.

The health of God's church is the health of its pastors. Are we feeding ourselves, my brother, on a healthy diet of sound teaching from God's word?

Is our preparation being squeezed out because of so many other pressures? Are we being distracted by looking over our shoulder all the time? My brother, please, please stay fresh.

soak up good truth daily, deliver it with all the might that God gives you. But at the end of the day, you remember it's God's word. It's God's salvation we're presenting.

[21:54] You and I are merely only humble servants. We're table waiters, serving the magnificent meal of Christ. And without the work of the Holy Spirit, it's all stodge.

So pray, pray, pray. Work, work, work, and lift up Jesus Christ. See, in public, we're to set an example of what it means to follow Jesus Christ.

And examples can be bad as well as good. A poor example means we've laboured in vain. We need to recognise our weaknesses. We need to walk humbly before our God.

We need to take stock of ourselves and our ministry. And we cannot do it alone. We always need others to infuse us in the gospel enterprise. And we here, all of us here at Bethel this morning, are to roll up our sleeves and to get gospeling with Jesus, lifting up James in our prayers as we promised.

Sadly, some pastors get stale. Preaching becomes dull and predictable. James, make sure you go to good conferences. Make sure you listen to people who sharpen you up.

[ 23 : 13 ] Meet up with those who will stimulate you to godliness and shape your preaching. Look after yourself. Teach the Bible. Hold up Christ.

Christ. When I started in ministry some 60 years ago, an assistant, no, it couldn't have been 60, it couldn't have been 17 then, wouldn't I, 18?

No, I was a bit late. 40 years ago, 50 years ago, years ago. Years which I can't remember as you realise. I was given this verse from the Bible which I found really helpful.

I've carried it around with me for years. It's Acts 18 and verse 10. Paul is at Corinth and the Lord spoke to him and said, I have many people in this city.

I have many people in this city. That's my prayer for you, James. That as you live out your faith in Christ, as you teach it well, the Lord will use you here to bring many people to himself.

[ 24 : 14 ] May the Lord nourish you for the task ahead. Let's pray together. Thank you, Heavenly Father, for sending Jesus into our world.

We are totally, totally, totally reliant on him. His work at the cross, his life and death, and especially his resurrection and ascension is the basis for all that we do.

Please will you equip James for everything good for doing your will. And will you work in him what is pleasing to you? And will you do it all through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.