

James Overview

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[0 : 00] What would you say is the biggest danger for your faith as you live in this world? What is it that could pull you back from living wholeheartedly for the Lord? And what could even prove in the end to take you away from following Jesus?

The book of James would give one clear answer. Double mindedness. That is being in two minds, thinking and wanting to live for God, but at the same time thinking about and wanting to live for the world.

The world that is proud humanity living for itself in rebellion against God. But how do we spot double mindedness? What are the symptoms that give it away?

Well, in James, this double mindedness is seen in the person who prays to God for wisdom, whilst at the same time not really wanting God to answer.

They are still in two minds about living God's way rather than their own way. So chapter one, verse eight, you'll see on your sheet. That person is a double minded man, unstable in all his ways.

[1 : 09] This double mindedness also shows itself in the person who listens to God's word, but never lives out in their life. So James warns, chapter one, verse 22.

The double minded person may hear and read God's words, lots and know lots about God's word, but they never live it out in practice in their lives.

The double minded person still wants to live their own way and live by the values of the world around them. Double mindedness is deadly for those who claim to follow Christ, because ultimately at heart it is spiritual adultery.

James four, verse four. You adulterous people, do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore, whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.

For the Christian who wants to live for God, but at the same time keeps looking at and desiring all that the world offers, they are committing spiritual adultery.

[2 : 21] And this is the danger we'll face if we are following Christ this evening. Whether we've been a Christian many years or have come to Christ later on in life, none of us are immune to this danger.

We are all tempted to move our eyes away from Jesus and look back over our shoulder. What life could be like if we live for the here and now? We want to live for Jesus. We really do.

But at the same time, we look for ultimate security, significance and satisfaction in our circumstances now, in our marriages, in our relationships with our children, in our workplace and careers, in our homes and possessions, in our savings and bank balance, and in our health and fitness.

In our plans for the future, both for ourselves and for our children, in what we're dating about, long for, pray for, strive for, in how we relate to each other and serve in church.

In all these areas, we can be thinking that we are living for God, whilst at the same time living for ourselves and our own agenda. This double-mindedness is real, deceptive and deadly.

[3 : 34] And so James is a great book for us to read this weekend, as it addresses double-mindedness head-on. Like a fire alarm going off in your home, James will give us a jolt that is for our good.

Or like a parent pulling back their child off the road onto the pavement, James acts boldly in love. So, as with all letters, we need to ask first, who wrote the letter James and who was the letter to?

So turn with me in your Bibles to James, chapter 1, verse 1. James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in dispersion, greetings.

So the author describes himself as James, a servant of God and the Lord Jesus Christ. Whilst it's not absolutely certain, church tradition over the centuries has held this to be James, the brother of Jesus.

Who does James write to? To the twelve tribes in dispersion. So the twelve tribes is an Old Testament way of talking about all the people of God. The dispersion just means those who are scattered out over a large area, away from their home country.

[4 : 53] So in the Old Testament, when God's people were in exile, scattered away from the promised land, they faced the challenge of living for God in hostile circumstances. So James is not writing here to one specific church.

He's instead writing to the Christian churches generally, as they seek to live out their faith in a hostile world, as they live away from their true home in heaven. So through all the letter, James calls the Christians his beloved brothers.

And this included both men and women. So chapter 1, verse 2. There will be hard truths for us as we read James's letter.

James will address double-mindedness in the Christian. But if you're a Christian here tonight, we read it as ones who James calls sisters. We read it as ones who have heard the gospel, the word of truth.

And God has, by that very same gospel, given us new life. So chapter 1, verse 18. Of God's own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

[6 : 16] This means we are those who, by the Spirit, will bear godly gospel fruit in our lives. And so, as James warns us about double-mindedness, he's also going to show us what a single-minded Christian will look like.

He will encourage us, as Christians, to live lives entirely focused in God in all that they do. I wonder, if someone asked us what a single-minded, God-focused Christian looks like, what would be the first things we would say?

Why not turn to the person next to you now and have a go, just for a minute. What would you expect to see in a single-minded, God-focused Christian? What would you expect to see in a single-minded, God-focused Christian?

Just for a minute. How does James answer that question? What are the key marks of a single-minded, God-focused Christian for James? Well, it's interesting.

Of all the things James could have said, there are three things he headlines. Look with me in your Bibles at chapter 1, verse 26 to 27. This is where James highlights three key areas of wholehearted living for God for the Christian.

[7 : 33] And these are three key areas that James will then spend the rest of his letter unpacking. So verse 26. If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue, but deceives his heart, this person's religion is worthless.

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this. To visit orphans and widows in their affliction. And to keep oneself unstained from the world. The first key mark of a Christian in verse 26 is speech.

It is in control in our tongue. It is holding back from sinful speech and then speaking words that are godly. Our speech is a litmus test for our devotedness to our Father God.

The second key area in verse 27 is to care for the vulnerable. So in James's context, it was to visit orphans and widows in their affliction.

And as James goes on to explain in chapter 2, such care for the vulnerable will show itself firstly towards those in the church family. So the Christian who is wholeheartedly living for God, this will be seen by their care for the most vulnerable in the church family.

[8 : 48] The third key mark of a Christian is verse 27. Keeping oneself unstained from the world. This means a Christian who is very aware of how the world's way of thinking can influence them to ungodly thought and behaviour.

It doesn't mean being a hermit and hiding away from all people and culture. But it means fighting for purity in thought and behaviour whilst living in the world.

It means pursuing a holy life. So godly speech, care for the vulnerable and purity in behaviour. I don't know about you, but I find James's choices both surprising and challenging.

And yet, at the same time, very encouraging. Because James is really talking about bearing the family likeness. James is talking about bearing the likeness of our father.

Our father God whose words are always true and loving. Our father God who always cares for the vulnerable. In fact, he always cares for us in our vulnerability and weakness.

[9 : 56] And our father God who is totally pure and sinless. And as the father, so the son. We see this in Jesus most of all. Jesus whose words were always true and loving.

Jesus who always cared for the vulnerable. Jesus who lived a life of purity whilst being fully engaged with the world around him. So James is encouraging us to live out who we are in Christ.

To live consistently as those who, chapter 2, verse 1. Those who hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. And so this weekend, we're going to focus primarily on the key area of speech.

In chapters 3 and 4. Why speech? Well, time means we can't address all three areas. And also, why not address speech? Being honest with ourselves, speech is an area of our godliness we can often overlook.

And yet, speech is something we use every day of our lives. I don't know how you're feeling about being here this weekend. Perhaps excited for a time away with the girls.

[11 : 04] Perhaps looking forward to getting to know each other more. Perhaps you're just exhausted and looking for a rest. I do hope and pray this is a weekend of friendship, fellowship and fun.

But wouldn't it be a joy and a delight for our souls if coming away this weekend, we learn more about living wholeheartedly for the Lord, especially with our speech.

And wouldn't it be a blessing to go back to London tomorrow to our families and share with them how our speech really can honour our Father? Wouldn't it be good news to share with the church family and to live out in our workplaces and amongst our non-Christian friends and neighbours?

So, as we look at James this weekend, let our hope and prayer be that we hear God speak to us. Let us pray that we together sit humbly under his word and soak in and savour all that he shares with us for his glory.