

Evidence of Faith

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[0 : 00] I woke up at about half past five this morning in a panic. Help. Because try as I might, that long reading didn't easily fit into Spurgeon's three headings.

I was really struggling. Now I have done my work. I've got a full script and all that kind of stuff. But I was still panicking this morning at half five. I'm not sure I can do justice to the word of God.

But as a weak person who's known God's grace in brokenness, I bring what I've prepared and I share it with you. And may God and his Holy Spirit apply that to each of our hearts.

I found a really key verse in chapter five and verse eight. The Lord's coming is near.

And really, if James, who I think was the half-brother of Jesus, who wrote this letter, which was probably one of the earliest letters written, and a general letter, and he kind of throws the whole kitchen sink about Christian behavior in the letter.

[1 : 21] If he had trainers today, he would wear Nike trainers. The Apostle James would wear Nike trainers because the slogan is, just do it.

And if he liked musicals of the olden days, the Apostle James' favorite musical would be, My Fair Lady. Because of the song, Don't Talk of Love, Show Me.

Because James is saying, Change your name or change your life. Call yourself a Christian. Well, if you're not behaving right, just don't call yourself a Christian. But if you call yourself a Christian, behave right.

Now, that's a tough message. Quite right, Peter. First Peter, second Peter. We were on holiday a few weeks ago, and it sounds flat. We went to Mallorca where the water doesn't taste like water. And there was this church on a hill, and it was called the Calvary Church. And the idea was, there were 365 steps up to the church, every step, every day of the year.

[2 : 45] And back in the olden days, we were told pilgrims would climb these steps on their knees to show that they wanted to please God by what they did.

Now, we know that we need to read this scripture in the light of the whole of the Bible, which says in Ephesians, by grace you're saved. Nothing we can do to make us right with God, but it's what God has done in Christ that makes us right with him.

And our little bit of faith in the God who gave his life on the cross in Jesus means we're forgiven.

We've not got to climb 365 steps on our knees to show how much we deserve God.

We can't do it. So, if we read this book of James, which Martin Luther said was, quote, an epistle of straw, he said it's hardly worth being in the Bible.

Sorry, Martin, on that, and on one or two other things. You were wrong. We need to read this letter in the light of the whole of Scripture. By grace you're saved.

[4 : 03] But as a speaker at my youth club when I was a teenager said, and this really worried me, if Peter, if you were arrested for being a Christian today, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

Good point. Good point. The Lord's coming is near. Now, the Old Testament said the Messiah would come.

James did not believe the Messiah had come when he was Jesus' half-brother. He was one of the group that went to tell him to stop it. You're a very naughty boy.

You're mad. Come back home. Stop it. It's going to end badly. You, the Messiah, you're joking. But then in 1 Corinthians 15, 7, we read that James met the risen Christ.

And that transformed his life. And he devoted himself to following his half-brother, who we now realize was God incarnate among us.

[5 : 12] And he spent so long in prayer, he messed up his knees. There's a bit of a theme here. He was called camel knees. Camel knees. Because he spent so long in prayer.

The Old Testament said the Messiah would come. The New Testament said, and James affirms this, the Messiah has come. Do you remember when John the Baptist was in prison, and he sent his followers to say, check with this man.

Is he the Messiah? And Jesus said, well, you go back and tell John. The lame walk, the blind see. The poor have the gospel preached to them.

Yes, I am the Messiah. So I'm a fairly simple soul. The Old Testament said Jesus would come. Isaiah 53. Go through all the prophecies in the Old Testament. And Jesus came in space and in time. And James recognized that.

[6 : 18] But here's the thing. Here's the thing. The New Testament said, Jesus will come again. Now, as I said, I'm a simple soul.

Old Testament says Jesus will come. He came. New Testament says, Jesus will come again. Go figure. He will come again in space and in time.

And James says, the Lord's coming is near. Now, I'm not suggesting you cash in your pensions right now.

Or maybe that's a good idea before the budget. I'm not saying, as some have on the internet that I've seen, thinking the rapture is about to happen.

Flog their car and just hanging around waiting. Well, they've now revised the date. Okay. Whenever anybody gets into dates. Ooh.

[7 : 22] Watch out. Because the Bible says, no one knows. Maybe the risen Jesus now knows from his father. But certainly the earthly Jesus said, no one knows.

The date. But the Lord is near. Ever since the death and resurrection of Jesus, his ascension and reign with the inauguration of God's kingdom, we are in the last days.

There'll be wars and rumors of wars. Tick. Plagues. Hello. Earthquakes. What's happening on Hawaii at the moment?

Are there more earthquakes? There used to be. I'm not a geologist. I don't know. But it's not the end. But there are signs that the end is near.

So what kind of people should we be if Jesus was coming back tomorrow? Martin Luther said correctly this time, I live as if Jesus died for me yesterday.

[8 : 33] He rose today and he's coming again tomorrow. What kind of people should we be as we wait, expecting Jesus to come again?

If I was arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence? If I'm trying to do justice to the whole passage, I want to say this.

Firstly, life's short. I used to think the principal of my theological college was very sad. Every lecture he gave us, he finished with, well, I'll see you next week if spared.

I thought, Reverend Dr. Barry White, what a sad man you are. If spared. If spared. And then he had a stroke and he lost his ability to think as an historian, if spared.

And certainly in the acute stroke unit, the Princess Royal Hospital linked to kings, but not as good as kings. That question came to me.

[9 : 52] Very unusual day. Praise God for a measure of healing. But life's fragile.

Do you remember old-fashioned Christians? We'll meet on the Lord's Day. D.V. Deo Valente. God willing. You know they had something?

God willing. We make our plans. But God willing. We'll meet next week. God willing. If spared.

Life is short. And the second thing is, chapter 5, verses 1 to 6, that God is just.

Maybe our bank accounts show more about our faith than our worship playlists. Thy kingdom come.

[11 : 00] On earth. As it is in heaven. That's why there's a passion for justice. What a blessing to hear your commitment in prayer and in practical ways to the poor.

That there is a website which shows, which showed me how rich I am. It's called Global Rich List.

Do you know the rich list where, you know, and I put my income in.

And I think it told me I was the 3 millionth, 450,000th most wealthy person on planet earth. I don't feel that because I look and I see somebody else has got a bigger BMW than my little mini.

I'm not rich. But according to the world, I'm absolutely loaded. Absolutely loaded. And to know that you're reaching out to bless those.

Now, that's charity. So if we ask somebody if they're poor and we can help them, we're a saint. If we say, why are they poor? We're a communist. But here reminds me of the vineyard fellowship I visited once in America.

[12 : 15] And they had one of these kind of things in the corner every week. And the slogan was, take what you need, give what you can. I said that to one of my bonus grandchildren.

He said, Peter, that's all. What if they take more than they give? I said, well, I don't know. Give what you can. Take what you need. And they were living out in that city in Florida.

Something of God's kingdom and getting involved with those who ran that city to support their work amongst the homeless and dispossessed.

Because God's a God of justice. I can't take it with me. Millionaire's funeral as the coffin went by. Somebody whispered, how much did they leave? The answer came back, everything. But we can give where we can.

[13 : 20] We give just a little bit like you. I'm concerned for knife crime. And I can't go and have credibility amongst gang members in Hearn Hill, Bromley.

I found there are gang members in Bromley in the post office. This guy was bad-mouthing the lady behind the counter. And as a former teacher, I kind of said, excuse me.

I said, excuse me, do you want to speak nicely? I said, I said, what? He said, what's it to you, my man? Step back.

And then I went passive-aggressive. I went, okay. What's it to you? I said, well, I want people to get on nicely and to speak well.

Step back, my man. Now, I can't really have credibility on the street. But I tell you, there's a group called Power the Fight who can.

[14 : 29] And they're over in Croydon Way. And they're just such an impressive group going into schools and doing something in terms of justice.

And we give a little bit to support that. And there are many here doing the same. We can't do everything. I know, Elizabeth, that you're passionate about Christians against poverty.

We can't do everything, but we can do something in our borough. And God's just. And God sees and God knows.

Life's short. But God is just. John Wesley, the reluctant founder of Methodism, said, Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, as long as ever you can.

God's also a God of truth. Because he is coming back again. Are we forgiving one another actively?

[15 : 48] Now, look. I don't mean if somebody's offended you and they're not aware, you go to them and say, You might not be aware of this, but you, because that'll make it worse. And also, if you do go and say, Look, I'm sorry that I did something.

They may say, Well, yeah, I'm glad you said that, because I've been waiting a long time for that. And by the way, there are these three other things that you did as well. So, careful, careful.

But, if they know that you know that you know that they know, and everybody knows that there's something there, can you think about taking that first step?

Probably best not by text, or WhatsApp. One family fell out for years, when her response was, Fine. And the person who heard it is, Fine.

And they meant, Fine. So, be careful. as far as it lies within your power, are you keeping short accounts with brothers and sisters?

[16 : 51] You can't, Paul says, In so far as it lies in your power. We can't necessarily do everything, but in so far as it lies within your power. Don't grumble against each other, brothers and sisters, or you'll be judged.

Whoops. Because Jesus is coming again. Not like Johnny English, or whatever it was, look busy, but get, get right with one another.

Don't let little things get in the way. Because it's true, Jesus is coming again. Forgive one another. Life's short, God's just, God's true, God is compassionate, and merciful.

Verses 10 and 11. We know life's, life's tough. Don't ever fall for the fact that we should be healthy, wealthy, and happy all the time.

[17 : 57] Have a word with St. Paul in heaven about his thorn in the flesh, and don't start getting all muddled up with how you can interpret that. It's quite obvious. He, he was ill.

He had an affliction in his eyes. He wasn't healed. He who raised, a young man from the dead, well, he put him to sleep anyway by preaching for too long, and I'll take the hint.

But he could raise the dead, healed somebody on Malta. So he believed in supernatural healing, and yet he who healed others said this thorn in the flesh was given.

I prayed for it to be taken away. So life is tough. The prophets knew that of old. Suffering. Jesus said, in this world, you'll have trouble.

Job's story had trouble, but by the end of the story, he was restored and blessed beyond his imagining. Now that may happen in this world.

[19 : 03] It could be you, but it may be in heaven. We had the privilege a couple of months ago of spending time with a lady called Dulcy, 96, with somebody called the Reverend Duncan Campbell on the island of Lewis.

The last time there was a revival that I would understand as a true society revival from the church in the island of Lewis in 1949 to 53.

She was with him there, and she's 96, and she's in Orpington Hospital, linked with kings, but not as good as kings. And she knows she's going home.

And the Lord gave her a dream which she shared with us. And she said, in this dream that God gave me, I was riding my bike, and it was my bike. And I was riding it in heaven.

And as Dulcy passed, she would have heard, well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord.

[20 : 12] Because God's compassionate and merciful. And God's the only God. It says, don't swear for many years I played cricket.

In fact, I still do, but it's an old people's team now, over 70s. It's cricket, but not as you would recognize it. And after one match, the captain of my team had had too much to drink, so he wanted to talk with me.

He said, Peter, just a minute, we've noticed that you don't swear. Could I ask you a question?

And I said, yeah, you don't swear. Do you think the words? I plead the Fifth Amendment for that one.

But what's meant here is don't swear by fake gods. You know, people say, oh, my mother's grave, I would, I'm telling you the truth.

[21 : 30] I'm telling you the truth. God help me. All right? Or, in those days, by other fake gods. God's grace. And there's only one God.

There's only one God. And just let your yes be yes and your no be no, because your character is trustworthy. God's the only God.

God's the God of healing. God's the God of healing. And then in verses 13 to 20, God's the God of healing. And let's say, quickly, there's no automatic link between sickness and sin.

Jesus cleared that up when his disciples said, who sinned, this man born blind? Was it the man or the parent? Because sickness, it comes from sin.

And Jesus said, no, not in this instance. But so that God's glory might be revealed. So, if you're ill, go to the doctor.

[22 : 41] If you're ill, go to the chemist. If you're ill, go to the physio. The chiropractor. We'll talk about osteopaths later, but go.

Oh, by the way, you can ask Liz and you can ask John if they would pray with you as senior leaders and they would anoint you with oil.

Why oil? Well, in those days, it was like medicine. Okay, so a tick to the chemist, yeah? However, even more, it's a symbol of the Holy Spirit.

The presence of God anointing somebody. It's a deeply powerful symbol. It's not magic, it's biblical. King Asa, in 2 Chronicles 16, 12, was criticized when he got ill.

Not for being ill, but it says, in 2 Chronicles 16, 12, he only sought healing from the physicians and not from God, in brackets as well, close brackets.

[23 : 51] months ago, something hadn't cleared up and I just, just on and on and on.

So, slightly reluctantly, I said to a couple of minister friends, part of the fellowship, would you pray with me, anoint me with oil? And they said, yes, and I've got a tiny little bit of faith, but I thought, I ought to do it because it says it.

And I've had tests after tests and after tests, and Elizabeth is a former surgeon at Guy's and Great Ormond Street and a GP, so she's medical, NHS, God, NHS and God, yeah?

So, I got them to pray with me and then I went back and had all the tests and every, one of the eight, all the eight tests came back clear.

So, I say, well, thank you. I didn't feel fuzzy. I just know God heals. Amen?

[25 : 06] Then, I went for another scan on something else and they said, that's fine, but we found this. I said, oh, great. How busy are Martin and Phil?

We'll give you another scan. I said, oh, okay. It's still there. Okay. We'll fast track you for the lung cancer clinic. Thank you, pardon.

We'll fast track you for the lung cancer clinic. Thank you very much. So, there I am in Beckenham, not as good as Kings, but linked with Kings. And they say, well, I think, we think it's okay, but we'll have another look in April.

Okay. But God's a healing God. When the late David Watson, a minister greatly used in the renewal movement, was coming towards the end of his life, although John Wimber, charismatic leader, prayed, he never promised David Watson would be healed.

He just prayed. But David wasn't healed. And David Watson said, look, most of my life I've lived on two legs, but I put most of my weight on this world.

[26 : 23] But now, I'm putting my weight, I feel it shifting to the world to come. But can't we live both? That's what David Watson was saying, because Jesus is coming again.

Am I going to be fully healed? Is that something benign? Or is it humanly a death sentence? I don't know. But I know whom I have believed, and I'm persuaded that he's able to keep that to which I've committed unto him against that day.

That's a hymn. Because Jesus is coming again. Because he's raised from the dead, which is a guarantee that he is the Messiah.

Messiah. I close with this challenge to myself as well as to us all. That man I mentioned, John Wimber, was a jazz professional and a group called the Righteous Brothers.

Anybody old enough to remember them? The Son of Eagles. He was with the Righteous Brothers.

But he wasn't righteous until he met Jesus.

[27 : 41] And he joined a group in his church. And he, you know, he used to chain smoke outside and come in to the group. And after a few weeks, he said to the church leader, when are we going to do the stuff?

And the church leader said, well, what do you mean? He said, well, you know, the stuff that I've been reading about, like healing and all that?

When do we get to do the stuff? And he said, well, we kind of don't do that now. You know, we have services and stuff, but we don't do that.

And John Wimber said, are you kidding me? I gave up drugs for this. And of course, not without controversy, but John Wimber went on to say, what, is there more?

Is there more, Lord, for us? James said, Jesus is coming again.

[28 : 57] Do I believe it? How does that affect my money, my plans, justice, forgiveness, evangelism?

God bless you for doing Alpha. Keep going. Keep going. It can be hard work. Is anybody going to come back again this week? Are they going to come back? Keep going.

Because Jesus is coming again and he'll say, well done. Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord.

God bless God bless God bless God bless God bless