



MAKING IT REAL 6 - Kneel before Him

James 3 v 13 to 4 v 17

James continues on his way with more helpful pointers as to how God's people should live. They should be distinct from those who 'live in the world'. There is more here about speech but also about the kind of relationships that should be seen in a Christian community. He develops ideas about true wisdom and how this works out in community. He leaves no room for 'on the fence' Christianity. He describes it as 'earthly, unspiritual and of the devil' (3:15)

James offers a clear alternative way to earthly religion. He talks about submission to God (that implies obedience) and coming 'near to God' (4:7). So again, he is very black and white about our walk with God but he also speaks about how God's way can be achieved. God is approachable but we must come humbly with hearts full of true repentance and we can be made pure again (4:8)

As with all the issues he raises, James is very forthright about our relationships with one another. Judgemental attitudes are forbidden. There is only one judge and it isn't me or you. Boasting also comes in for criticism. There is no room for it in a Christian's speech.

**As a starter you might like to discuss whether James' ideas are too black and white.
Is it possible to live this way in a world full of compromise and tolerance?
Are his standards impossible to live up to? Should we even try?**

It must always be remembered that James was writing in the first century. Christianity was new and he needs to make clear what it's about. How was it to be distinctive from the Greek/Roman world? Was it simply a continuity from Judaism and, if not, how was it different? All the New Testament writers were trying to explain what a relationship with Jesus was like and how it made a difference to your everyday life. Surrounding them were religions that largely separated daily living from what you believed. This made Christianity radically different to much of the prevailing cultures and religions of the first century.

It is well worth looking to see how much James relates what he's saying to everyday life. We see it in chapter 4 – 'Today or tomorrow, we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money'. That would have resonated with many of James' readers.

**When you have a moment read through the whole epistle and see how often he refers to real life situations.
In our 21st century world do people separate what they believe from how they behave?
If people are like that, does it mean that they can make up their own values and change them whenever they choose?
Is that healthy for them or for society?**

FROM THE PASSAGE

James raises the question of wisdom. He claims that wisdom gives rise to humility and good deeds shown in a good life. (v13). In a Greek setting wisdom made you a superior being – a cut above the ordinary people or a more slick debater. But James says if you 'harbour bitter envy or selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth' (v14). This is why the Bible makes a clear distinction between knowledge and wisdom. You may know lots of things but that is no guarantee of wisdom in your life

- 1. How do we guard against being proud of our wisdom?
Do we sometimes confuse knowledge with wisdom and become proud of our own achievements?
Wisdom seems to be connected with what we do rather than what we say.
What is meant by living a GOOD LIFE? (v13)**

James' definition of wisdom (the sort that comes from heaven – v17) is full of moral qualities that describe the way we live. They are purity, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. (v17). Our version of wisdom may well be a man or woman who makes very profound statements which exhibit their great knowledge. The wise man is the one who lives a godly life because they have learnt their behaviour from a holy God.

2. If we re-defined wisdom according to James, how would that change the way we live?
Would it alter the people we admire?
Would it encourage us to change and if so, how?

In chapter 4 James turns to quarrels in the church. He implies that these happen when we fail to learn the true meaning of heavenly wisdom. 'You want something and you don't get it (v2) sums it up well. This is a very telling picture of a person who will stop at nothing to get what they want. And it connects with the previous section. Using worldly wisdom (the standards of the world) makes us want what we can neither afford or don't really need.

3. It is so easy to slip into worldly thinking. If I want something I am determined to get it at any cost.
Despite the fact that God has promised to supply all our needs, why do we sometimes get tempted to covet what somebody else has.
How hard is it accept that what we have is all we need?

James antidote to this is submission to God (4:7) But it is also to resist the devil – that is our responsibility with God's help. We are told we must humble ourselves before the Lord (v10)

4. What does it mean to submit to God?
What does it mean for us to 'grieve, mourn and wail'?
Is James implying that we should all be a lot more miserable?
Does humility come easily?

In the section from verse 11 to 17 James addresses how we should treat each other. In particular how we judge one another. Again, James is clear – 'anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it' (v11)

5. When is it OK to judge another person? We have to make judgements about people (e.g. are they suitable employees) but is that what James is on about? In a leadership role we have to make judgements about people who are assisting us.
When does judgement start to be wrong?

THINGS TO DO

Again, James's writing is challenging and encourages us to evaluate what we do.

Why not take time to

1. Think about wisdom you may need in a difficult situation you are facing. Ask God to give you his wisdom.
2. Is there a need to re-think what you regard as a wise man or woman – have you substituted 'clever' for 'wise'?
3. Have you been involved in a quarrel with another brother or sister – do you need to put that right?
4. Do you too easily judge another believer?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Spend time with God as you submit to him, his commandments and his values that you may know true heavenly wisdom.