

Preachers' Gathering 2019

Preaching James

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INTRODUCTION

Three Views on The Crux and Core of James

The Unity of James

The View of D.E. Hiebert

SOURCE: D.E.Hiebert 'The Unifying Theme of the Epistle of James'
Bibliotheca Sacra July – Sept. 1978 pp.221-231.

A number of scholars have struggled to find a unifying theme in James. E.g.

John Calvin (c1551) 'it contains nothing unworthy of an Apostle of Christ. It is indeed full of instruction on various subjects, the benefit of which extends to every part of the Christian life...'

Goodspeed (1937) James is 'just a handful of pearls, dropped one by one into the hearer's mind'.

Lenski (1938) 'This entire epistle deals with Christian faith, and shows how this faith should be genuine, true, active, living, fruitful'.

Hunter (1946) 'an ethical scrapbook It is so disconnected, as it stands, that it is the despair of the analyst'.

E.C.Blackman (1957) 'simple things for the ordinary member who is not interested in theology, has no deep religious experience, and yet feels called to be faithful in that which is least; who asks for no spiritual banquet, but is content with a diet of straw!'

Dibelius (1957) says James shows a lower middle-class ethos and working-class Christianity which fails to rise to the theological heights of Paul or John!

Adolf Schlatter (1957) Our churches have done themselves serious injury by giving to James only an altogether superficial hearing.

Kee, Young and Froehlich (1965) 'The whole epistle is concerned with one simple truth: It is not enough to 'be' a Christian, if this fact does not show in one's conduct'.

Barker, Lane and Michaels (1969) 'a series of sermonic expansions of certain sayings of Jesus'.

Scroggie (1970) 'has no one subject as have most of the epistles, more than a dozen themes being treated almost disconnectedly' – probably abstracts of sermons preached by James in Jerusalem.

H.S.Songer (1972) ‘It was characteristic of *parenesis* to place together in loose organization a series of exhortations without any concern to develop one theme or line of thought in the entire writing’.

HIEBERT’S POSITION

In his 1978 article, D.E.Hiebert pointed out that ‘faith’ *pistis* occurs 16 times in James and the verb *pisteuo* three times. James apparently places little focus on the theological content of ‘faith’. James’s purpose, according to Hiebert, is practical: ‘to present a series of tests whereby his readers can determine the genuineness of their own faith’. Hiebert argues that this is the key (1:3) which actually unlocks the whole letter and constitutes the unifying theme. One could preach a sermon series on the basis of ‘Faith’.

He believes the sermon theory of James’s material (Scroggie) is ‘very probable’.

Faith tested by trials, testings and temptations 1:2-18

The key section seems to be 1:2-18 in which James opens up his overall thought, rooted in 1:2-3. Since faith is the crux of all Christian life, it is of paramount importance that its reality and genuineness must be tested and purified. God’s greatest gift to humanity is his work of regeneration through his word. The rest of the letter is then spent in evaluating, challenging and refining faith in a wide spectrum of areas of Christian living in a hostile and ungodly world.

Faith tested by its response to scripture 1:19-27

God’s Word is the means of regeneration. Thus, a key test of living faith is a life-changing response to Scripture. Keen to hear it, resisting temptation to reject it and curtailing of rejection. (1:19-20) The Word must be given free reign – 1:21. There must be consistent obedience to it – 1:22-27. This should be accompanied by inner power to control the tongue – 1:26. Freedom from worldly contamination should result – 1:27.

Faith tested by its reaction to favouritism 2:1-13

Partiality is inconsistent with Christian faith. Such favouritism has negative consequences - 2:5-11. The law of liberty should control our lives - 2:12-13.

p.226 ‘The practice of mercy, giving a man what he needs and not what he deserves, will reveal that God’s grace has produced a transformation in their own lives’.

Faith tested by the fruit of works 2:14-26

Ten references to ‘faith and works’ in this portion. This is how saving faith is tested – by its production of fruit. ‘Can *that/such* faith save him?’ No. Even an orthodox creed is barren without works. p.226 ‘The faith of the demons stirs their feelings but does not change their conduct’. Both Abraham and Rahab were

justified *by their faith*, but their faith showed forth its living nature by what it enabled them to do. Hiebert on verse 26 says (p.226) – ‘An inactive faith, entombed in an intellectually approved creed, has no more saving power than a lifeless corpse’.

Faith tested by the fruit of self-control 3:1-18

This is best shown by control of the tongue – the mark of a mature man or woman. The importance of control of the tongue can be seen in 3:3-6; struggle to control it is seen in 3:7-8; inconsistency of uncontrolled tongue is seen in 3:9-12; the two *wisdoms* are seen as fighting for control in 3:13-18 ie. the tongue displays the inner spirit in control, enabling wise, moral decisions to be made by the believer in community.

Faith tested by its response to worldliness 4:1-5:12

Worldliness puts *self* or *worldly things* at the centre of human aspirations and activities. This can take a variety of different and often subtle forms –

- a) Strife and faction - 4:1-12. Quarrels indicate worldliness. The latter is actually spiritual adultery (4:4). God requires our undivided attention. We are called to live in a right relationship to God.
- b) Presumptuous plans – 4:13-17. ie. planning without God. These people assume that the unknown future is actually under their control. Rather should there be a submission to God and God’s Will. We are not called by God to live independently of Him.
- c) Wrong reaction to injustice – 5:1-11. In verses 1-6 James prophetically denounces the cruelty and injustice of this world, but in vv. 7-11, he tries to safeguard believers against a worldly reaction to experiences of injustice. This is an unusual holding together of contrasting issues. James *does not* suggest that these rich persons are Christians.
- d) Self-serving oaths – 5:12. This is important but often ignored. Many Jews had learned to hide truth under an oath, by distinguishing between binding and non-binding oaths (Mt. 5:33-37; 23:16-22). This gave the appearance of appealing to God to try to establish the truth, but were actually dishonest! The truth of their words should be open for all to see!

Faith tested by dependence on God through prayer – 5:13-18.

The core of Christian faith lies in prayerful dependence on God in all the circumstances of life – 5:13. This is applied to the issue of sickness and healing –verses 14-16a. The prayer, not the oil, is the healing means.

Hiebert p.230 argues that ‘The prayer offered in faith’ (5:15) apparently denotes a prayer prayed in the Spirit-wrought conviction that it is God’s will to heal the one prayed for’.

The sickness *might* be due to sin, but the construction in the original text confirms that this is not necessarily the case! The results of prayer encourage mutual confession of sin – 5:16a – or is confession part of the healing mechanism? Or even a condition of healing? Confession releases the power of God.

Verses 19-20 seem to be a *conclusion* to the whole letter. Straying from the truth may be a reflection on all the issues raised by James that he pleads ought to be avoided in the lives of believers.

Hiebert concludes p. 231

‘The author’s stern insistence on Christian practice consistent with Christian profession, his open contempt for all sham, and his stinging rebukes of worldliness in its various forms are notes that are urgently needed in Christendom today’.

The Structure of James

The view of G.R. Beasley Murray

SOURCE: G.R. Beasley-Murray in *General Epistles: James, 1 Peter, Jude, 2 Peter (Bible Studies)*, Abingdon Press, 1965 p.16 wrote –

‘Is there a plan in this writing? Most critics believe that none exists outside the minds of the commentators... Paragraphs are linked by catchwords, so causing the topics to be connected and developed apparently in purely accidental fashion’.

Later in his book he suggests –

‘It is difficult to believe that James spoke wholly without premeditation. Dr Newton Flew thinks James had a plan.... He noticed that the ten verses following the opening greeting briefly touch upon subjects which receive further treatment in the letter *and in that order*: so that verse 2 speaks of the attitude to adopt to the trials of life, and this is the subject dealt with in 1:12-27; verses 3-4 describe the testing of *faith* as issuing in steadfastness that produces the perfect *work*, anticipating the treatment of faith and works in chapter 2; verses 5-8 treat of wisdom that God gives to those who ask, which is the subject at the heart of chapters 3-4; verses 9-11 contrast the poor and the rich, with emphasis upon the judgment facing the latter, which is the dominant theme of chapter 5’.

P.B.R. Forbes ‘The Structure of the Epistle of James’ *The Evangelical Quarterly* 44 (1972) on p.148 notes that the letter was written to be read aloud and regularly, probably in instalments (sections). Forbes suggests that James and a

number of other NT letters were around the same length and could reasonably have been read out in one, two or three sessions. Thus chapters 1 and 2 together have 53 verses and a possible second section – chapters 3,4 and 5 – have 55 verses.

The first section – chapters 1 and 2 – has 5 similar length parts:

1:1 and 2-11; 1:12-21; 1:22-27; 2:1-13; 2:14-26.

The second section of 55 verses falls into 8 parts –

3:1 & 2-6; 3:7-12; 3:13-18; 4:1-10; 4:11-17; 5:1-6; 5:7-12; 5:13-18 & 19-20.

Each of these divisions seems to have material which constitutes a fairly definite and intelligible unit.

Forbes believes that James is writing in 2:14-26 against perversion/misunderstanding of some of Paul's sound teaching to the Gentile Mission. He also suggests that the teaching on oaths in 5:7-12 was needed because corruption in Greek society had led to a situation in which oaths were the only means of ensuring promises were kept. Forbes feels sure that James was writing prior to the collapse of the corrupt Jewish theocratic regime in 70 AD.

The Heart of James

The View of C.E.B. Cranfield

SOURCE: C.E.B.Cranfield 'The Message of James' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol. 18, 1965 pp. 182-193 and 338-343.

In the view of Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 265-339) James was like books that were 'disputed, but familiar to the majority'. In the *Greek* part of the Church, James's letter seems to have been widely accepted from Origen onwards ie. AD 185-255. However there seems no clear trace of it in *western* writers before mid-4th century AD. Luther's hostility to the letter is well known. Luther had felt that James taught works-righteousness, failing to mention Christ's sufferings or resurrection and thus showing 'no evangelical character'.

THE POSITION OF CRANFIELD.

He believes that churches which fail to see discrepancies between *their profession and their practice need* to be shaken out of their blindness/complacency. The way to achieve this is probably *not by repeating the central tenets of the gospel!* This would probably simply harden believers in their conviction that they are already, and have been for years, theologically perfectly sound!

According to Thurneysen, James had a particular tactic to address this flaw among his readers and thus he argues that 'James preaches Jesus Christ, His

cross and resurrection, the power of forgiveness and the obedience of faith, and nothing else: but he preaches this in his own peculiar way'. (*Der Brief des Jakobus* p.5) Thus James presented Christ's Gospel in a particular style.

Suggested dates for this letter range from AD 45 to the first quarter of the second century AD. Cranfield notes the use of connecting catchwords in James. Eg 'lacking' links 1:4 and 1:5. This looseness is also seen in Rom.12:1 – 15:13; esp. 12:9-21.

However, for Cranfield, James *does show real unity* ie. the *persistent ways* in which James seeks to test *the reality and genuineness of the professions* of his Christian readers.

Crucial to Cranfield is the section **1:19-27** concerning the reading of, and response to, Scripture. The key job of all congregations is to *Hear The Word of God*. Such hearing should humble us before we dare speak to men and women. We may still need to condemn sin but let us not do it self-righteously or arrogantly. We must view sinners not as the enemy but as fellow-sinners. In verse 20, hearers of the Word will seek the relief of the wronged rather than retribution on the wrongdoer. Calvin - 'meekness' = 'humility and the readiness of a mind disposed to learn'. The 'implanted word' is the Word of God. Right hearing of that word means *allowing it to work unimpeded in the heart and life*.

Verse 22: Cranfield p.187 'We have not studied the Bible properly until we begin to live according to it.... To fail to see this is to deceive oneself'. See Mt. 7:21-27; Jn. 3:21; 1 Jn. 1:6.

Verses 23-25: It is entirely possible to look into a mirror but then to forget the mess it reveals and do nothing about it! In the mirror we see ourselves in sin but as the objects of God's grace, needing life transformation. The Word of God is gospel and law and it not only judges us, but sets us free. The perfect law liberates.

Verse 26 announces that *right hearing* of the Word *affects our speech*. It tests the reality of our faith.

Verse 27 shows that worship is meaningful *only* in the context of *justice and compassion*.

p.189 'There is a worldliness of thought and feeling and behaviour, which, in Christians, is an indication either of their having ceased, or of their never having begun, to look steadfastly into the mirror of God's Word'.

In God's Word and in our response to it, lies the heart of a truly-tested Christian faith.

2:1-13 (Cranfield) The term ‘respect’ in the RV text is an archaic usage, meaning ‘snobbishness’ or ‘failure to oppose injustice for fear of the rich and powerful’ or ‘racial discrimination’ ie. it is used *negatively*, compared to its *positive* connotation in the world of today. Discrimination against the poor devalues the poor. It actually insults what God has done in Christ in breaking down barriers. If God has honoured a poor person, how dare we dishonour that person? That is a denial of the gospel! We cannot argue that attention to the rich shows our loving of our neighbour! We are to love all people equally.

In verse 8 the ‘royal law’ should be taken to mean the law as a whole. This avoids making a distinction between the law in verse 8 and law in verses 9-12.

Verse 12 is a reminder that all speech and action must finally be accounted for. We must be careful not to become so pre-occupied by the picture language of judgment that we *forget the reality* that such language *actually portrays*!

The Will of God for us is the ‘law of liberty’. It is God’s good and holy law, of which Christ is the *goal, meaning and substance*.

Thus James is not contradicting justification by faith but rather is reminding us that –

‘...the absence of compassion for one’s fellow men is conclusive proof that one’s professed faith is counterfeit, while mercy shown – though certainly not to be thought of as a meritorious work putting God under an obligation – may be an evidence of genuine faith’.

2:14-26 The clue, says Cranfield, lies in verse 14. James did not say ‘if a man has faith’, but rather ‘if a man *says* he has faith’. Thus the key argument here is *not* that we are saved through faith plus works, *but rather*, that we are saved through genuine, as opposed to counterfeit, faith’. Verses 15-17 say that such false faith is dead – as lifeless and fruitless as a dead body! Verse 18a shows the words of a possible objector and in verse 18b the objection is answered – the objector is challenged to give an example of faith existing by itself without works of obedience. James is saying that faith without works is not really faith at all. James offers to show real faith, proved by its accompanying works.

Verse 19: Orthodox theological belief is great but in itself, it does not amount to saving faith. NT believing is not only in or into God/Christ but also is used with the dative in the sense of giving credence to a person or message. The noun ‘belief’ denotes faithfulness or trustworthiness. It thus becomes easy to see why there might be some misunderstanding if people use these terms differently. It may well have been that James was arguing against some who were leaning

towards an understanding of faith largely as an intellectual position. In verse 20 James confirms that Abraham was justified by faith. His works did not earn his justification: they were simply the fruit and outward evidence of his faith. James does seem to imply that if there had been no works, then Abraham would not have been justified. However, that would have been because the absence of works would have meant that he had no real faith.

Verse 22: This and the previous verse are not out of line with Paul. What is the meaning of *sunergei* 'wrought with' and *eteleiothe* 'was made perfect'? The former can probably be translated 'supported' or 'sustained' ie. Abraham's faith was the source and ground of his works, and his works the expression, the manifestation, of his faith. This would thus confirm that faith and works simply cannot be separated!

Paul: In Rom 4 Paul is attacking the idea that people can put God under an obligation to themselves. Thus he stresses that not even Abraham, the father of all God's people, *earned* his justification, so who on earth could claim to earn it?

James: In Jas 2:14-26 James is attacking the idea that a real faith can exist without producing works of obedience. Paul and James thus have different aims and language.

Verse 24: James is making a concession to his opponents' use of terms. He does not believe that a faith that does not produce works is really a genuine faith at all. However, for the moment he accepts his opponents' way of speaking and thus is compelled to deny that a man is justified by faith alone. According to Calvin, James puts together two radically different examples – Abraham and Rahab – to prove conclusively that *no one* has ever been accounted righteous without good works. James then argues in verse 26 that a faith which does not produce good works is as dead as a body without spirit.

3:1-12 (Cranfield) James was aware that teachers in churches held very responsible positions.

p.342 '...to have a bad minister is a far worse evil for a parish than to have no minister at all'. Mark 9:42 underlines the dangerous positions of teachers. If our feeding of the flock causes people to perish, then we are indeed in deep trouble.

p.343 'How perilous it is to be someone whose daily business is actually to speak about the Word of God is obvious when we remember how prone to err we all are, and especially to err in our speaking'.

Control of speech is the foundation of overall self-control of the total human being!

James in verses 3-5 cites three small things that have influence way beyond their size – the bit in the horse’s mouth, the ship’s rudder and a spark. Cranfield feels that the reference to the tongue has general reference to all spoken and written speech, but especially to the tongue as the medium employed constantly by teachers.

Verse 6 is a textually difficult verse but the overall intention is very clear – the tongue is a ferocious fire. When set on fire by hell, it can be universally destructive eg. false teaching through the ages, causing damage and confusion; blind hatred; prejudice produced by propaganda; moral decay.

Verses 7-8 show human inability to control the tongue. The separation of *anthropon* ‘of men’ in emphatic position at the end of the sentence from *oudeis* ‘no one’, might be significant as a hint that, although humans struggle to control the tongue, God is nevertheless able to help.

Verses 9-10a James underlines the compromised condition of the speech of the Christians he addresses in his letter. Such speech is often at odds with gospel truth and gospel life to the extent that even the very gospel itself sits unnaturally in our speech. Thus the real obstacle to our gospel communication is not the issues that are hard for postmodern people to grasp, but rather our own lack of integrity in and through our speech. Thus for example, clergy and other church leaders/teachers often make promises and pronouncements which they don’t actually believe, whether out of doubt or hypocrisy or deliberate deceit. How can unbelievers or believers be expected to take such leading and direction seriously?

Verses 11-12 show how crazy is the state of Christian speech. It is both unnatural and absurd. James challenges the church in verse 10b –‘My brethren, this should not be’.

Cranfield (p.345) calls his readers to ‘...seek His help who alone can tame their tongues and so bind them to His Word, that a real measure of human dignity and integrity may be restored to their speech’.

Brief Background Issues of James's Letter

SOURCES: Moo and Martin

History of the Letter

James was recognised as canonical at the end of the 4th Century A.D. i.e. *late* (Hebews and Revelation were also late). A universal, rather than local, letter.

Some scholars see parallels to, and confirmations of, James in other New Testament letters and in many late (1st and 2nd Century) non-canonical Christian writings, but all of them also reflect a more general traditional body of teaching. Matthew and 1 Peter have most in common with James.

Clement's successor in Alexandria – Origen – is the first to refer to the letter of James by name and as Scripture. Origen died in 253 A.D. Eusebius (d. A.D. 339) gives James canonical status but was aware that others disputed its 'canon-worthiness'. For example, Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428) rejected all the general epistles. However, James was included in the 5th Century Syriac tradition, the Peshitta and Chrysostom (d. 407 A.D.) quoted it freely.

In the West, James was omitted – perhaps by accident due to textual mutilation – from the Muratorian canon (late 2nd Century A.D.). James appears in mid 4th Century in the Western church and was promoted by Jerome through his inclusion of James in his Latin translation, the Vulgate. Jerome identified James as the 'brother of the Lord' (Galatians 1:19). Augustine also readily acknowledged the authority of the letter.

Probably, the frequency of the name 'James' caused some to wonder whether this actually was the 'apostle' James. Some may have viewed it as 'non-theological'. The letter was probably aimed at Jewish churches in Palestine or Syria. Its circulation among these Jewish churches may have been hindered by the Jewish revolts in A.D. 66-70 and 132-135.

Doubts regarding James' letter re-emerged at the Reformation. Erasmus saw the high quality of the Greek in James therefore doubted that it was written by the Lord's brother. For Luther the doubt concerned the conflict between James and major NT letters regarding justification by faith. Nevertheless Luther did not reject James and included half the verses of James in his writings as 'authoritative.' Luther, however, says he cannot include James among the 'chief books' such as Romans, Galatians and Ephesians. Luther was disturbed by James in that he said the letter contained no substantial gospel and taught justification by works, whilst neglecting Jesus' death and resurrection.

Calvin is more favourable to James, saying we should not expect all NT writers to deal with the same issues. He saw James and Paul as being in harmony re. justification. Each gives a *valid* contribution to our understanding of 'faith'.

R.P Martin sees James neither as rabbinic moralism nor a subtle Christological writing. He sees it as a Christian writing with a Jewish flavour. It does have deep reflection of Christ's teachings. Perhaps antinomianism was a threat leading to moral apathy. The letter raises the issues of the twin dangers of legalism and moral laxity.

Authorship of James

There are at least four people called James in the NT:

- 1) James, son of Zebedee - called to follow Jesus in Mk. 1:19. James, with his brother John, and Peter became close to Jesus in Mk. 5:37; 9:2.
- 2) James, son of Alphaeus. Also one of the twelve - mentioned only in the lists of the apostles or possibly in Mk 15:40 as 'James the younger' or 'lesser'.
- 3) James, the father of Judas. In Lk. 6:16 and Acts 1:13, however, this could be rendered 'Judas the brother of James' i.e. possibly James the Lord's brother, *but* 'son of' is more likely i.e. Judas the son of James'. This Judas (not Iscariot - see John 14:22) is shown as one of the twelve in Luke 6:16 and is probably the Thaddaeus in Mt 10:3 and Mk 3:18.
- 4) James, 'the Lord's brother', of Galatians 1:19. Jesus' brothers questioned Jesus' authority (Jn 7:5) but James rose to significance in the Jerusalem Church Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18; Gal. 2:9.
- 5) A James not even mentioned in the N.T. – unlikely because the use of the name suggests a well-known person.

James, son of Zebedee, died a martyr's death in AD 44 (Acts 12:2) and 'James' was probably not written this early. James, the Lord's brother, is therefore the *most likely*.

Case *in Favour* of Authorship by James, the Lord's Brother:

He rose to prominence among Jewish Christians then was stoned by the scribes and Pharisees (Eusebius H.E. 2.23) – i.e. Historia Ecclesiastica. This death was confirmed by Josephus (*Ant. xx.9.1*) who dates James's death in AD 62.

- 1) The idea of James as 'the Lord's brother' came under some suspicion because it challenges the idea that Mary stayed a virgin after Jesus' birth. Jerome suggested that James and the other 'brothers' of Jesus were actually his cousins. He identified Mary of Clopas, a sister of Mary (John 19:25), with the Mary who is said to be the mother of James and Joses (Mk 15:40),

both of whom are identified as 'brothers of Jesus' (Mk 6:3). Therefore, James and Joses would be cousins, not brothers, of Jesus. However, *adelphos* always means 'brother' when blood relationship is identified in the NT. Therefore, James is either an older brother of Jesus born to Joseph by a wife before Mary or a younger brother of Jesus borne to Joseph and Mary. This latter option would explain the close NT link between Mary, mother of Jesus, and the brothers of Jesus (Mk 3:32; 6:3). The early church, though not very early, did confirm this authorship of the letter.

- 2) Textual issues: The Greek of 'James' has similarities to the Greek of the speech attributed to James, the Lord's brother, in Acts 15:13-21 and to the letter sent under his authority, recorded in Acts 15:23-29. The epistolary 'greeting' (*chairein*) occurs in James 1:1 and Acts 15:23, but only one other time in the NT. Not conclusive evidence, but indicative of similarity.
- 3) The style is Jewish in flavour, e.g. the use of Palestinian rural references to sun, wind, rain, plants, plus the basic Christology of 1:1 and 2:1. The meeting place of the church is called a synagogue (2:2) and the oneness of God - a key Jewish belief - is mentioned in 2:19. Yet there is little developed theology. It is probably an early writing in a Jewish context. Jesus' teaching is reflected in the letter and James's position in Jerusalem would have justified his addressing 'the twelve tribes'.

Case *against* Authorship by James, the Lord's Brother:

The majority of scholars who challenge authorship by James, the Lord's brother, attribute the letter to an unknown Christian leader. Thus the name 'James' in 1:1 was either added at a later date (i.e. the book was originally anonymous) or was used by the author to add authority to the book (i.e. The book is pseudonymous). Scholars have argued on certain grounds –

- 1) It is impossible that a brother of the Lord could have failed to mention his special link with the Lord or the resurrection appearance that changed his life (1 Cor. 15:7). *But* physical links to Jesus began only *after* Jesus' death. James only entered a spiritual relationship with Jesus after the resurrection (Mk 3:35). Paul for example mentioned the resurrected Christ in only 2 of his 13 letters.
- 2) James is written in idiomatic Hellenistic Greek, sometimes using Greek philosophical language e.g. 'the cycle of nature' in 3:6. This is surely, some say, not the language of a Jewish Christian. Responses:
 - a) James' Greek was polished, yet it does not use long words or complex grammar.

- b) As head of the Jerusalem Church James probably had the capability to learn *Greek* well.
- c) The religious ideas in James would have been common among educated Palestinians, where Hellenistic ideas were well known.

3) The author refers to the OT law as 'the law of liberty' (1:25; 2:12) and stresses the 'moral commandments' (2:11), not the ritual law. This therefore cannot be the James that tried to press the ritual law on Paul in Acts 21:20-25. However, James did oppose the effort to impose the law on Gentile Christians (Acts 15:13-21) and he never claimed that any Christian must carry on following the ritual law. The idea of a ritually legalistic James has no historical basis and there is no incompatibility between James's likely view of the law and that found in the letter. He stressed love.

4) Some say there is a basic conflict between James (works have a place in justification, 2:14-26) and Paul (justification is by faith alone). However, the two had met at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), then again in Jerusalem (Acts 21:18ff) in 55/56. James died in AD 62. Romans 3:5-8 indicates that Paul's preaching on justification by faith was being misunderstood. Some *may* have twisted that doctrine into an excuse for spiritual laziness. This may have happened even *before* James met Paul and James would thus not have had the chance to discuss this in depth with Paul and to grasp the fuller context into which Paul was writing, with regard to justification. This argument requires an early date for the letter of James. It is significant that James's polemic is not directed in favour of 'works of the law'.

Conclusion

Some argue that a scribe helped James or that the letter is a free translation of an Aramaic discourse or that the first stage of the letter's composition was in a series of Jewish-Christian homilies from Aramaic and Greek and the second stage was an editorial blending of these materials into a single letter. Moo believes these theories are unprovable but are basically unnecessary since there is strong evidence that James, the Lord's brother, was the authentic author of the whole letter.

Historical Setting of the Letter:

- 1) Virtually definite that the original readers were Jews - the letter has the flavour of the OT and Judaism e.g. James's use of the feminine 'adulteresses' (*moichalides*) in 4:4 reflects the link between the Lord's covenant and the marriage relationship. James's references to 'the law' suggest strong familiarity to author and readers. References to 'monotheism' in 2:19 and 'synagogue' in 2:2.

The NT portrays James as ministering among 'the circumcised' (Gal 2:9).

- 2) The letter suggests a poor group who were oppressed by the rich - 5:4-6; 2:6-7; 5:7-11. These believers are called to persevere in their pain. He wanted the believers to be unstained by the world - 1: 27.
- 3) James highlights a number of worldly perils as they threaten to infect the church-
 - favouring the rich and despising the poor 2: 1-4
 - critical speech 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:9
 - demonic 'wisdom' that exalts self 3:13-4:3
 - arrogance 4:13-17
 - double-mindedness that fails to pray 1:5-8 and fails to act in faith 1:22-27; 2:14-26

James calls the church to humble itself 4:7-10 and to work to correct other sinners 5:19-20.

- 4) The *actual* destination is uncertain. The '12 tribes of the Dispersion' became a term for the renewed Israel following exile to Assyria and Babylonia – see Isa 49:6; Ezekiel 47:13, 21-23; 48:29, Ecclesiasticus 36:11; 2 Esdras 13: 39-40. It *may* have been the case that James was trying to address Christians and non-Christians. This *might* explain the lack of references to specific Christian doctrines. However, James would surely have given a more overt evangelistic emphasis towards non-Jews. Also, James would not have reckoned all Jews to have been spiritually renewed.
- 5) James probably uses 'the 12 tribes' to mean a broad spectrum of Christians, though some believe he is primarily addressing Jewish Christians. Dispersion means 'scattered' and refers to Jews or Jewish Christians living outside Palestine among Gentiles – see Isa 49:6; Psalm 147:2; John 7:35. However, the NT also uses '*diaspora*' for all believers who are living outside their heavenly homeland. This sounds vague geographically but Acts 11:19 may be a clue that the Jewish Christians, scattered as a result of

Stephen's stoning, had gone to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, where the gospel was preached to Jews. These places might be the destinations of James' letter.

6) In Galatians 1:15-2:12 Paul seems to recognise the growing importance of James. There is informal contact between them in Galatians 1:19. Then in Gal 2:7-9 James and others seemed to approve Paul's gentile ministry. It is hard to know how far James approved the Jerusalem unease with the mission in Antioch – see Gal 2:11-14. The tension between Paul and James is located in Rom 15:30-31; Acts 21:17-26; 24:17 and possibly 2 Tim 4:16-18. Paul did organise the Jerusalem Collection for the poor saints but we do not know for sure whether it was accepted. James, in 1 Cor 15:7, is named as a 'resurrection witness' – seeing his brother raised from death may have been the point at which James came to faith. Yet Paul does not explicitly count James as one of the 12 apostles. Luke never links James directly with the holy family as a brother of Jesus, but he is more sympathetic in his presentation of James than is Mark.

Historical Setting of James's Life and Death:

There are three areas of evidence from the historian Josephus-

- 1) *Antiquities* 20.197-203: very reliable historically. Between the death of the Judean procurator Porcius Festus in AD 62 and the arrival of his successor L. Lucceius Albinus, three to four months later, the high priest Ananus II put to death 'James the brother of Jesus' through a Sanhedrin decision. James was accused of breaking the law but it remains uncertain whether this referred to the Torah or to the Roman law. It may be that the high priest was still irritated that James had failed to rebuke Paul publicly. Later writers like Clement of Alexandria portrayed James as a martyr for his proclamation of Christ.
- 2) Josephus (*Jewish Wars* 4.314-25) writes sympathetically of Ananus and the Sadducean aristocracy in AD 62. The peasant population of Jewish-Palestinian society were oppressed and exploited by a Jewish ruling class. Against this Sadducean-supported aristocracy popular prophets arose to challenge the status quo. This may explain why Ananus removed James.
- 3) In *Antiquities* 20.180-81 we learn that from AD 59 onwards there was internal conflict among the temple clergy ie. between the aristocratic high-priesthood who supported Rome and the priests/Levites who sided with the oppressed poor. All we can say is that James would have been sympathetic to the peasant people and lower priests. This may well have led to James' death at the hands of Ananus II.

Date of Writing:

If James, the Lord's brother, *did* write this letter then it must have been composed before his martyrdom in AD 62. Some say that the issue of 'worldliness' suggests a second-generation church datable around AD 60, but 'worldliness' was also an issue in the young Corinthian church! The letter could be dated early eg. AD 45-47 and the following reasons have been offered for the possible early dating of the letter -

- 1.) James 2 suggests an awareness of Paul's 'justification by faith' but also indicates misunderstanding of that position. Such a situation was probably prevalent *before* James and Paul discussed this at the Council of Jerusalem in AD 48 or 49. When Paul preached in Antioch around AD 45 (Acts 11:25-26) some Jewish Christians might have misunderstood his message in that region (Acts 11:19). As head of the Jerusalem Church, James may have responded to the confusion.
- 2.) An early date is suggested by the absence of any reference to the Jew/Gentile controversy concerning the 'ritual law', an issue which arose just before the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1).
- 3.) An early date would fit the general background of the letter - social/economic distress, like the Judean famine of AD 46 (see Acts 11:28) and the start of the political turmoil that led to the Jewish War of AD 66-70.

A number of scholars would postulate an earlier version of the letter which recorded the witness of the historical James. Most scholars tend to acknowledge the timelessness of the letter as we have it and would date it similarly to that of Jude ie. somewhere between AD 40 and AD 150.

Origin and Destination of the Letter:

Moo's view on authorship and dating suggest that James wrote from Jerusalem to his readers in the coastal area north of Palestine, in Syria and perhaps also in southern parts of Asia Minor. The reference in 5:7 to the 'earlier and latter rains' is typical of rainfall sequence along the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. Travelling merchants (4:13-17), unjust and often absentee landlords (5:1-6), heated church debates (3:13-4:3), zealot movements to free Israel (perhaps 4:2) all fit well with first century social conditions in Palestine and Syria.

Five Significant Issues in James -

Christ in James

See Michael J. Townsend 'Christ, Community and Salvation in the Epistle of James' in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, Vol. 53, 1981.

In James, there is evidence in a number of places of presupposition of a theology of grace, rooted in the cross and glory of Christ. James's main title for Jesus was 'Lord' occurring six times in 1:1; 2:1(combined with Jesus); 5:7; 5:14; 5:15. 'Lord' is also used with intended reference to God the Father in 1:7; 4:10; 4:15; 5:10; 5:11.

A clearly Christological reference is in 2:1. This literally reads 'our Lord Jesus Christ the glory'. James may be referring here to Jesus as the Shekinah Glory of God. This in Jewish thought is the Glory of God *dwelling* in the midst of his people. Indeed Jewish thought was reluctant to name the name of God, so 'glory' became a synonym for God Himself. God dwells with His people in and through the risen and glorified Christ, in spite of their sinfulness. In 2:7, it might be that this recalls the name of Jesus being called over those being baptized. Whether this be the case or not, the Christian community was 'called' after its Lord, Jesus Christ.

Thus the term 'Jesus' may well have been a primitive but persistent designation for Jesus. Townsend puts it like this – 'The appeal is not to the example or teaching of Christ, but to the difference his presence with his people ought to make'. (p.118) Any who show favouritism/snobbery/injustice in the Christian community show massive insensitivity to the presence of Christ in the midst of that community.

The Christian community in James's mind has clear features of an early Jewish Christianity, containing rich and poor. The body includes 'elders' (5:14-16) with spiritual functions, the term likely taken over from the synagogue. The only other officers mentioned are 'teachers' (3:1). We must be cautious about seeing consistent or uniform patterns of church order in the NT, but these teachers presumably taught new converts. W.D. Davies says that there is a unity of wholeness, a diversity of gifts and a development of forms.

James frequently referred to fellow members of the community as 'brothers' – 15 times in the Letter of James, yet there is very little background in Judaism for the use of this term 'brothers'. Jesus did use the word to address His disciples – Jn. 20:17. In James the word 'brothers' is used pastorally in the context of moral exhortation. This is important, for James may seem at times rather harsh in his dealings with the believers, yet he has a deep spiritual and pastoral concern for

them. Slander is forbidden in the community because it is a *Brotherhood*. Likewise grumbling in 5:9 is out of order because the community is a *Brotherhood*. Rebukes can legitimately be offered in such a setting.

Probably because of the supposed contradiction between James and Paul over faith and works, there has been much confusion over James's position on *Salvation*.

The word 'Faith' in James and in Paul *does not refer to exactly the same thing*:

Paul: Faith is the quality by which humans are enabled to understand and grasp God's grace in Christ.

James: In 2:14,19 faith is an intellectual belief in monotheism, a declaring of orthodox theistic doctrine. Thus 'Can his 'faith' save him?' If so, then it is not a case of James 'correcting' Paul or vice versa. Calvin said '..it is surely not required of all to handle the same arguments...but this diversity should not make us to approve of one, and to condemn the other'. James may have been replying to those who twisted the true gospel by descending into antinomianism and claiming authority for their conduct from Paul himself. Paul himself would have condemned such conduct. James is simply saying that faith must be *real, not a pretence*. (See Mt. 7:16,21). James in 2:24 is basically arguing that where no works exist, it must be concluded that no faith exists either! A person without works cannot claim to be justified by faith, if the faith is unreal, barren and utterly unfruitful.

James contains much moral exhortation and instruction for acceptable conduct – a feature of 'second-generation' teaching. C.F.D. Moule said the danger for second-generation Christians is that 'they may forget the vital thing which changes life – the power of Jesus crucified and risen – and preach and teach instead the results rather than the cause'. (Moule *Christ's Messengers* London, 1957 p. 42)

However, the letter is most likely dated AD50-AD60, which is far from a second-generation document. Moule argues that James's letter is probably based on a sermon and 'it is quite possible that, on some occasions, the preacher might **assume** the Gospel and concentrate on ethical teaching'. (Moule *Worship in the NT* London, 1961 p.65)

Evidence for Gospel Assumption

James 1:17-25 is significant: *all gifts* for salvation and living come *from God*. Verse 18 confirms that 'of His own will' underlines the centrality of divine initiative in granting new life through conversion. The 'word of truth' is the gospel of salvation. This case is strengthened in 1 Peter 1:23. Those converted

by this word of truth are ‘*firstfruits*’ for God (See possible link to Jer. 2:3).

James 1:19-21a gives moral exhortations *based* on the fact that believers have received the ‘word of truth’ and in verse 21b, James again calls believers to ‘receive with meekness the implanted word which is able to save your souls’. Thus James’s advice on *right ethical behaviour* is firmly rooted in the *grounds* for such behaviour, namely, that God’s Word – the gospel of Christ – has been planted *within us* and is able to save us. Both James and Paul teach an ethics of *grace*.

Townsend p. 123 ‘...obedient submission to the gospel is the necessary precursor of right living. James does not only ‘assume’ the gospel – he states the necessity for it’.

Community in James

(*SOURCE*: James Riley Strange, *The Moral World of James: Setting the Epistle in its Greco-Roman and Judaic Environments*, Studies in Biblical Literature, Peter Lang Publishing, 2010)

James 5:13-20 Here we have a set of instructions about certain acts of piety within the Christian community, centering on *sickness and sin* – the crises that remove members from community life. This passage identifies 4 distinct but related religious practices – prayer (vv. 13,14,16); healing (vv. 14,16); confession (v. 16); correction (vv. 19-20). Religious practices in James are understood as morally positive and are inseparable in community maintenance for James’s readers. Moral and religious discourse help to form and maintain communities by laying down methods of correction, restoration and exclusion. James Strange then attempts to use other texts to compare the diagnostic categories for understanding how James presents religious practices as moral responses to crises within Christian communities.

James’s Community Vision – Life, Death and Restoration.

James is very concerned about group solidarity and preservation, especially visible in his concern about sin, its consequences and salvation. He is deeply concerned about the effect sin has on the community and he wants to see those effects reversed. In James 5:13-20, prayers for healing, mutual confession of sins and mutual correction share certain features in common - all are communitarian, all deal with sin’s effects and all achieve a degree of reconciliation. James prescribes the religious practices of healing, confession and correction, as means of redemption for sins that alienate community members from the group. Those

sins threaten the survival of the group. James wants to deal with sin in the community, by restoring the sinner to fellowship.

Life – The brotherhood of the community is united in love and united in life. They were formed by God and likely initiated by baptism – 2:7. They were given life. They had been implanted by the word (1:21) which has power to save them. The giving of life is linked to the eschatological life of the future – 1:9-11,12,21. God sows and grows the word in the community – 5:9b. Leaving the group or deserting the group means to dissolve God's community and to experience death.

Death – James sees sin, envy and selfishness as root causes of instability and potential death in the community. He raises the issues of sin and evil *repeatedly* through his letter. *Sin* = Refusing to help the poor in the community (2:9,15-16); damaging speech (3:1-12); uncontrolled desires (4:1-2); adultery with this world (4:4). Most of the imperatives are addressed to the insiders but at 5:1-6 apocalyptic language is heard – wealthy landowners will be treated as outsiders with no hope of restoration, whether they were insiders or outsiders. James says in 4:3 and 17 that the insiders' failure to trust God for their wellbeing is also 'sin'.

James repeatedly makes clear that sin actually does lead to death. This could include refusal to pay daily wages that might lead to someone's literal death! Thus, for example, the 'Father of lights' gives life and therefore plays no part in *temptation*. It is our own evil desires that enslave us, such that desire leads to sin and sin leads to death (1:14-15). This word *peiradzomai* - 'tempt' - links back to the noun *peirasmos* 'temptation' or 'trial' of 1:12 where the context suggests the person enduring trials is tempted to give up faith and therefore also to give up the community of the faithful. The practices recorded in 2:6-7 and 5:1-6 are likely sources of temptation for these abused community members in the direction of apostasy that might give relief from such treatment (cf Heb 3:12; 6:4-8). To be in the community means to be saved from death and the response *must* be actions/works eg 1:22-25; 2:1-6a; 2:10. Not to have works suggests a member has become an outsider and is thus counted dead!

3:1-12 deals with uncontrolled/destructive speech. The tongue is small but powerful – a 'world of iniquity' – capable of controlling the whole body (3:2) and staining the whole body (3:6). If we cannot control our speech, then we are functioning like 'outsiders'. This includes 'boasting' (3:5 cf 4:16), cursing (3:9), double talk (3:9), judging fellow members, as if God had not given that person new life and membership of the community (4:12).

This 'death' can be viewed in three ways –

- a) A person wishes death on a fellow.

- b) Boasting and cursing alienates the doer from the rest of the community because this person is not living the community life, but a worldly life.
- c) This kind of behavior gets out of control and can destroy the community.

This is what James means by ‘murder’ (4:2) – the destruction of the community. 4:1b is not about psychological stress or struggling with inner desires. It is about a problem that involves a group of members. James writes of this as wars and battles that do damage! People follow their own desires and inflict hurt on others. Whoever becomes a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.

Restoration to Life – James views the Christian community as birthed by God in a happening that reflects God’s first creation acts. This community is opposed to the world and its lifestyle. If the community follows the world’s ways, it will disintegrate and dissolve. This absorption of the world into the community is called ‘sin’ by James and Christian distinctiveness is lost, as well as members being lost from the community. The result is death! The solution is in 5:13-20 ie life, reconciliation and restoration. This preservation of the life of the community works out in the following ways –

- a) **Prayer** – James makes reference to prayer in 1:5,6; 4:2,3; 5:13-20. The prayer in 5:13 seems best understood as a prayer for patience or endurance. The prayer and song of 5:13-14 suggests that this is an individual activity. The prayer for the sick person by contrast involves the elders in oil-anointing and prayer. The ‘prayer of faith’ appears to be effective but that raises the question of what ‘faith’ means here? In 1:6 *en pistei* is in contrast to *diakrino* whose meanings can express the idea of division or separation, including the idea of someone torn between divided loyalties. It displays the sense of someone with a lack of conviction that God will grant the request. 1:5-6 means we must ask for wisdom in faith, not shifting from our faithfulness to a generous God. Those undergoing perfection by enduring ie the *faithful* will have their prayers answered. God’s nature is undivided which means we also must be undivided when we ask Him. We become divided when we ask from our own selfish desires. We are called to model our own actions on God’s own faithfulness. Using the example of Elijah’s faithful prayers, James gives assurance of the power and efficacy of prayer in 5:16. We can expect the same for prayer made in the Christian Church.

Thus the ‘prayer of faith’ is one that is “made by people (in this case, elders) who are wholeheartedly and unflaggingly devoted to God, and who stave off satisfying personal desires in order to act out God’s will.” (Strange, 2010:29) God wants elders and members to pray for one another’s physical health and wellbeing ie praying for the moral good of the community. This

transaction requires the faithfulness and righteousness of the people, but God is the one who acts in answer to prayer. The complexity in 5:13-18 is that James uses eschatological terms that have double meanings – v.15 what is meant by the Lord ‘will raise up’ the sick one? The word *sodzo* (‘raise up’ in v15, ‘save’ in v20) is difficult to interpret precisely! How much, moreover, is the salvation language of 5:13-20 referring to God’s priority of healing/restoring His community from the damage inflicted by sin?

b) Healing – Does James envisage an immediate physical healing with restoration to health, *or* is it an eschatological prospect of salvation/ healing on a figurative level?

Healing and faith are often linked in the Gospels egs. **Matt 9:21-22** (Mk 5:28,34; Lk 8:48); **14:36** (Mk 6:56); **Mark 3:4** (Lk 6:9); **5:23**; **10:52** (Lk 18:42); **Lk 8:36; 8:50; 17:19**; **Acts 4:9; 14:9**. Cf. Lk 7:50; **16:31**; **Rom 10:9**

Sickness and sin are also often linked – **Matt 9:2-8** (Mk 2:1-12; Lk 5:17-26); cf. **Lk 7:47-48; 1 Cor 11:29-30**.

Some healings also have Jesus ‘raising folk’ to their feet, egs. **Matt. 8:15** (Mk 1:31; Lk 4:39) **9:6-7** (Mk 2:11-12; Lk 5:24-25); **9:25** (Mk 5:41-42; Lk 8:54-55). Cf **Matt 9:27**; Lk 7:14; **John 5:8**. **Acts 3:7**; **Mk 3:3**; **10:49**

The link between the verb *sodzo* and the transformation of a person’s righteousness before God is well attested in the Gospels, as well as being used by James himself in 1:21; 2:14; 4:12 [5:20?] egs. **Matt 1:21; 10:22 / 24:13** (Mk 13:13); **16:25** (Mk 8:35; Lk 9:24); **19:25** (Mk 10:26; Lk 18:26 [cf 13:23]; **24:22** (Mk 13:20); **Mark 16:16** (‘long ending’); **Luke 1:47, 69, 71, 77; 2:11; 8:12; 9:56** (Western tradition); **19:9,10** (cf Matt 18:11); **John 3:17; 4:22,42; 5:34; 10:9; 12:47**; **Acts 2:1** (=Joel 3:5), 40; **4:12; 5:31; 11:14; 13:23, 26, 47** (=Isa 49:6); **15:1, 11; 16:17, 30-31**.

James says nothing about the function of the oil itself. It is the prayer of faith that heals! Biblical anointing refers to a symbol of God’s special favour rather than possessing any intrinsic healing property *per se*.

Basically, the sins that result in illness are crimes against fellow community members; healing then comes by the prayers of the community. Sick people then return to health *and* to the community. James sees the success of this prayer and then encourages all members to confess sin and pray for each other’s healing. All members are looked after. As sin was moral bad, healing is moral good. James minglest his eschatology into the language of 5:13-20

c) Confessing Sins – James is *very concerned* about sin – it damages. It gives birth to death; it is a consuming fire; it is a lethal toxin. Abusive landowners

are issued dire warnings of divine judgment to come. James believes that serious illness is linked to sin. Meanwhile, community members await the Lord like a farmer awaiting precious crops. Confession is to be made to one another since sin always affects the community as a whole. This is a strong call to openness and honesty. Thus, mutual confession has immediate but also eschatological consequences.

d) Correction Of Sinners – There is a link between the pair ‘will save’ and ‘from death’ in 5:20 and the similar pair ‘to save’ and ‘to destroy’ in 4:12. To turn back a sinner will save him or her from the eternal death described in 5:1-6. God is constantly giving – ‘crown of life’, ‘perfect gifts’, ‘birth’, ‘implanted word’. We as believers must act for the benefit of the community and for the salvation of unbelievers. Turning back sinners is a ‘work’ that shows our faithfulness and that leads to someone’s salvation. In 5:19-20 it does seem that the capacity to change the drifting sinner lies with the person doing the correcting, rather than with the sinning person. Likewise in 5:15 it is the elders’ faith that effects the healing, rather than the sick person’s own faith. Of course this all assumes that there is a strong Christian community into which repentant sinners can be warmly welcomed and truly accepted. Sin and remedies for sin are firmly set by James as the responsibility of human interaction within the community! The instructions in 5:13-20 are set in an eschatological framework. Even the reference to Elijah is significant, for he was considered in Jewish thought to be widely present in the triangle of the end of the age/judgment/repentance. Interestingly, James fails to mention excommunication – he rests his hope of restoration to this vital community via the means of confession and correction.

Summary For James, remission of sins demands inter-community moral acts. God is not responsible for our progressive slide from temptation to desire to sin to death. God works constantly out of his mercy and compassion. He *gives*.

God is constantly giving life but we are instructed to exhibit works that run alongside God’s life-giving deeds and God’s eschatological rewards. God uses the community’s works to effect divine change! God uses our religious works to work out His loving care in the community that *He* gave birth to. His instructions in 5:13-20 are designed to reverse the effects of sin and preserve His community.

Final Conclusions

Across Greco-Roman religions, the benefit of divine power is generally presented as an advantage to the individual follower/adherent of religions. By contrast, James presents the practices of prayer, healing, confession and correction as having eschatological outcomes, as well as effects in the here and

now. Thus healing restores the body *and* brings about forgiveness of sins; it is also linked to the sinner's restoration to God *and* the Church. James has deep *corporate* concerns and is highly committed to the Church's need to do *works*.

- 1) For much of Greco-Roman religion, adherents were not encouraged to remain faithful to their gods much beyond the solving of specific crises. James, on the other hand, accepted that faithfulness may well increase suffering now but promises salvation at the *parousia*! God demands perseverance and a practical caring for the community that God will judge. God delivers care through the moral acts of church members. For James, sin destroys intra-communal relations and it is by submission to God and community actions that these damaged relations are restored.
- 2) In James, religious practices respond to moral crises in the community. Sin is the chief threat to the structure and stability of the community because sin is done against fellow members of the community. The precise details of praying and confession are minimal in James and this contrasts with the highly specific schedules of Judaic religion. James also has no mention of a restored Israel and no treatment of honour and shame issues, except where he deals with wealth and social status. Actual family and household also seem to be missing in James. Indeed James focuses on the Lordship of Christ and on Jesus' teachings as the community's instruction. He strongly stresses daily living, preserving the community and persevering amidst internal and external trials. He is very conscious of the upcoming judgment that will be ministered to believers.
- 3) James shows no optimism about the city or the Roman Empire or the restoration of Israel. He focuses on the survival of the local Christian community and the transformation of its values, vision of God and lifestyle. Suffering must be endured until Christ returns to reign and to judge. He uses metaphors about receiving death from sin and life from God. His pleas have their authority in God and the community is given birth by the Father but there is urgency in light of the coming *parousia*. Sin is the root issue and is in danger because it continues to listen to demonic voices/ earthly wisdom, instead of godly voices/heavenly wisdom. James's believers are living in foreign and hostile surroundings and must adapt to that pressure whilst living godly lives.
- 4) James's letter shows no hint of breaking away from Torah or of Jesus material taken directly from the written gospels. Jesus' return is expected soon and there is no sense of having to explain a delayed *parousia*. Dating of the letter is probably in the early decades of the Christian era – perhaps around the times of Claudius (41-54) or Nero (54-68). Perseverance is key + resisting evil from this world + doing works that show its divine life.

Concepts in James

Two fundamental concepts appear as motifs in James – Wisdom, and The Righteous Sufferer

1 Wisdom

Wisdom is “that outlook which when embodied in practical endeavour enables the pious believer in Yahweh to face life, to make sense of its enigmas, and to surmount its problems” (Martin p lxxxvii) ie. life is experiential and cognitive, but also mysterious and ambiguous.

Wisdom represents our response to dilemmas eg the prosperity of the wicked and the trials of the innocent sufferer. At the heart of Jewish wisdom is the idea of divine creation and the ordered universe.

Wisdom itself is a divine gift and demands the human response of obedience. This element of Jewish religion appealed to a wider range of peoples and needs.

James does indeed reflect a wisdom tradition-

- common language of 2:6 where the rich *drag* the poor into court cf. Job 20:15 LXX. Also the withering of riches in 1:10-11 cf. Job 15: 30 LXX. Also the call to *constancy* in James 1 and 5 cf. Job 15:31 LXX.
- Common set of pictures and metaphors eg 'fading flower' of James 1:11 links with Prov 27:1; Job 13:28.
eg movement of heavenly bodies in James 1:16-18 relates to Job 38:33 LXX
- Wisdom herself is portrayed as a divine gift eg James 1:5; 3:13-18. The idea of the ship and horse (freedom of movement and power) in 3:3-5 link with Jewish concepts of wisdom. Fire and tongue also have a connection.

There are themes in James that might show James as heir to the Jewish wisdom tradition -

a) Figures embodying wisdom

eg Solomon, Noah, Jacob, Abraham, Moses, Enoch, Hezekiah all receive recognition of their wisdom in Jewish tradition. In the letter of James, the focus is on Abraham, Job and Elijah as people of prayer and faith.

b) Prayer and wisdom

See Wsd. Sol. 9:4,6 cf. James 1:5 re. lack of wisdom.

Wsd. Sol 9:6-13 cf. James 1:5 re terms like 'perfect', 'wisdom that comes from God'. cf. James 2:1 re. 'glory'. cf. James 4:15 re. 'what the Lord wills'.

Prayer is also linked to wisdom in James.

5:11 cf. Job 42:8-10; righteous man in James 5:16 cf. Prov 15:8, 29.

Consistency is lacking in divided persons (1:6-8) and disobedient persons (4:3) who fail to translate faith into action (1:22-27; 2:16-17)

c) **Wisdom and peace**

A close link is made in James between wisdom as divine gift (1:5), prayer (4:2), and peace (3:17-18). Sirach makes a similar link. Eg obedience to God's law (Sir 2:16; 5:1) and the pursuit of forgiveness (Sir 35:5) are the fruit of wisdom cf James 1:25, 2:8 and 5:16

d) **Eschatology**

God links with order; evil with disorder. Wisdom expects retribution on the godless but salvation for the righteous. James thus stresses divine creation (1:18) and order to oppose evil (3:6), but his main focus is on social injustice and the need for judgment – 2:5-7; 4:11-12; 5:1-9.

Meanwhile, believers are to wait patiently.

Conclusion

James seems to have drawn from a common body of tradition which he uses in a typically Jewish hortatory/practical way. For James, wisdom is active, divine and a gift. It has a moral base to it with a righteous/eschatological angle to it. James however is distinctive -

- 1) James condemns the rich in his audience but he does not praise poverty per se. He does not equate poverty and piety.
- 2) His linking of suffering and wisdom reflects Dispersion Judaism rather than Palestinian wisdom tradition. He is less concerned to link wisdom with Torah observance than was customary in the OT-Judaic tradition of Proverbs. He is more concerned about the link of law to faith, love and practice – 1:6; 2:5; 2:23; 5:15.
- 3) James' focus is on obedience to God's will in his 'royal law' and translation into loving involvement. Yet this sort of living *will* meet opposition and the righteous must respond with patient endurance, awaiting divine vindication.

2. The Righteous Sufferer

The triple idea of - 1) the humble, devoted to Yahweh.

- 2) the vocation of suffering is given to them.
- 3) they will be rejected by the world but will look to God for vindication/reward.

This has a *long* history in OT – Judaic religion -

- i) The 'righteous' in Israel probably originate in a cultic setting eg Psalms 15 & 24. They are promised divine blessing. The 'righteous' will attract enemies eg Ps 35:24-27. The twin foci of the oppressing rich and the victimized poor. God will eventually humble the rich. (Ps 7:6-8).
- ii) The prophets of Israel dealt with social injustice eg Amos 2:6b-7; 6:1, 4-6; 7:10-17. God will intervene in judgment. *See* Ps 137; Jer. 8:18-22; Isa. 53.
- iii) Suffering and wisdom are linked in Ps 34. Pain is the norm but God will be faithful to His covenant whatever the circumstances - Ps 49:15; 73:24; 94:14-15. Ultimately all will be well for the righteous.
- iv) Three works in early Judaism contribute substantially to the idea of suffering for the righteous – Sirach, Wisdom of Solomon and 'Psalms of Solomon'
 - (a) Sirach 2:11 Trials for the righteous which require perseverance (v10), leading to joy.

The believer, during this testing, must not fail by misuse of the tongue (22:27). In Sir 24, Torah is identified with wisdom and the two are connected by the 'fear of the Lord' shown by the righteous.
 - (b) 'Wisdom of Solomon' portrays the suffering of the righteous man. In chapters 2-5 this righteous man is pursued and persecuted to death and no one helped. However, in 5:1-7 the man returns in a reversal of fortunes and the onlookers repent cf Isa 52:13-53:12. This sort of juxtaposition formed the basis of the apocalyptic antithesis between good and evil. The righteous will endure and be vindicated.
 - (c) 'Psalms of Solomon' shows divine testing of those who fear Yahweh – 13:7-12. Vindication and resurrection will be their lot, but they must first endure. They must obey Torah and be faithful in spite of the Sadducean power (17:5-6, 23) and Roman power of Pompey in mid-first century BC (17:11-18, 22). Ultimately Jerusalem will be elevated (17:30-31).

Summary

Trial is followed by vindication.

The righteous-poor, law-abiding, Torah-observant minority – will be persecuted by sinners, unjust, godless.

The righteous must endure until vindicated, when the ungodly will be punished – see 1 Sam 2:7-8; Ps 113:7-8; Prov. 29:23; Sir 3:18.

The humiliation – exaltation theme was deeply Jewish but extended also into the NT – Matt 23:12; 2 Cor 11-12; Phil 2:6-11; 4:12; 1 Peter 5:6; James 4:10

Faith and Works in James

See Richard Bauckham, *James*, Routledge, 1999.

Background

Luther struggled greatly to accept the Letter of James –

‘A person is saved by faith alone. The danger was great. I know of no stronger expression of how great it was in Luther’s eyes than that in order to get things straight: the Apostle James must be shoved aside’. (Kierkegaard *For Self-Examination: Judge for Yourself*. Kierkegaard’s Writings 21st Ed. and Trans. HV Hong and EH Hong. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1990)

Luther himself wrote ‘I will not have him in my Bible to be numbered among the true chief books, though I would not thereby prevent anyone from including or extolling him as he pleases, for there are otherwise many good sayings in him’.

James was very slow to gain general recognition. Possible reasons –

1. James appears to contradict Paul on the question of faith and works in Justification.
2. James is addressed to Jewish Christians which might have made it seem not directly relevant to the strongly Gentile Church of the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

Generally speaking, Paul has tended to be given priority over the other NT letters and James 2:14-26 seems to contradict Paul’s teaching on justification by faith. The order of books in the NT in Protestant and Catholic Bibles can seem to major on Paul, but in fact the Orthodox Churches arrange the same NT canon differently: Gospels, Acts, James and the 6 other general letters, Pauline letters, Revelation. This is the order in the oldest extant canonical list – the 39th Festal Letter of Athanasius (367 AD). Ever since this date, that order has been

preserved as the normal eastern order. The western order may be as old as the eastern, but it might be that the Pauline corpus was already established before the general letters, and thus the Paulines got in first! The western order puts Paul's letters straight after Paul's story in Acts, but the eastern order, following Acts, the story of the apostles, gives priority to those who functioned as apostles before Paul.

Thus there is no reason to think that Paul is our primary source on NT Christianity and that James and others add a few additional thoughts! Because there has been such controversy re. James's view of faith and works, the latter has tended to be assumed to be the major focus of James's letter, so that other themes in James have been eclipsed. The notion that James was a very conservative Jewish Christian opposed to Paul and his Gentile mission is without foundation. The idea that James disagreed with Paul over circumcision and food laws is unlikely since James fails to deal with these issues in his letter.

James's Position on Faith and Works

The verb *pisteuo* (I believe) can be used with reference to a purely intellectual belief that a statement is true but it can also mean trust in, and surrender, to a person or thing. Likewise *pistis* (belief) can be the content of belief and also faith in the sense of trust, commitment and faithfulness. *Pistis* can mean 'believing' but more commonly means 'faithful'. These meanings and usages are closely paralleled in Hebrew. 'Faith' and 'faithfulness' are very close eg. initial coming to faith, followed by continuation in faith during testing.

In James, all *three* aspects of faith are present – assent to truth, trust/commitment and faithfulness. All three dimensions are present if the faith is genuine. Faith without works or which does not produce works is the sort owned by the demons. This is dead and useless. Real faith works along with works actively (2:22). This faith is completed by works (2:22b). Works are the necessary completion of faith if faith is truly a surrender to the divine will. Thus James can imply, in quoting Gen 15:6 (2:23) that Abraham was justified by faith, but also by works (2:21 cf. 24) because Abraham possessed the type of faith which produces works, as the fruit and completion of faith. Indeed works show faith – 2:9b. Thus Abraham believed that God is one – 2:19 – but his faith was productive in his faithful obedience to God.

The Faith of Abraham

Two key events are noted by James –

1. Gen 15:4-6 God's promise to Abraham of a son and thus multiple heirs. Then 15:6 'Abram believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'. In Jewish literature, this was taken as applying to *all* Abraham's life. In 15:6 Abraham's faith is seen as his confidence in God's promise despite appearances.
2. Gen 22 – the *Aqeda* - was a supreme test of Abraham's faith and obedience. Abraham stood the test and God renewed the promise – Gen. 22:15-18. In Abraham's obedience, the test was passed and this 'work' completed his faith, for in the *Aqeda* of 2:21, Gen 15:6 was fulfilled (2:23). Faith worked alongside works. God has said that Abraham was righteous by faith (Gen 15:6) but this verdict is confirmed by the testing of faith in Gen 22. In this sense, Abraham was justified by works and not by faith alone – 2:24.

Abraham's works proved his faith to be faithfulness. This faith was active in producing works. In Jewish tradition and in James himself, Abraham's faith was understood as 'faith working through love' (Gal. 5:6). Similarly Rahab (Josh. 2:1-21; 6:25) was not justified by faith alone but her faith was completed by works, namely her help to the spies. Jewish literature has many examples of the danger of professing religious belief whilst neglecting the practice of charity towards the needy. James's focus in 2:14-19 is not reliance on cultic service of God without practice of righteousness, but relying on *belief* without practice. Jewish commitment to, and potential pride in, monotheism was not in itself sufficient, unless it produced the fruit of works which completed true faith.

James and Paul

James's teaching against a Jewish background makes sense, without any need to see it as a reaction to Paul.

1. The faith that James projects as unconnected with works is clearly *not* the sort of faith that Paul refers to in the context of justification by faith. Both James and Paul see faith as trust in God which produces works. cf. Rom. 4:19-21; James 1:6; 2:19.
2. Paul generally opposes justification by works *of the law*, whereas James mentions *works*, but not law. However, James probably assumes that these works are acts of obedience to the law. The issue can be generalised to 'works' outside Romans and Gals. Eg in Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 3:4-7, but arguably the contexts are still Jewish.

3. The key issue in Romans and Galatians is whether Gentile believers need to take on board ‘works of the law’, as well as faith in Christ, in order to join the eschatological people of God. James 2:14-26 is surely *not* a polemic against Paul’s teaching. Paul was involved in debating faith and works but *only* in the context of this issue of Gentile membership of the Church. James, on the other hand, ignores the latter issue. Thus Bauckham believes that James *probably* wrote without any reference to the Pauline debate over faith and works. It is true that Rom. 4:2-3 and James 2:21-24 are very similar but it would not be strange if both, given their Jewish background, used Abraham as their model of faith. Both writers used the phrases ‘justified by works’ and ‘justified by faith’. *Why?* Both are *probably* dependent on a Jewish tradition of Abraham. Gen 15:6 seems to say that Abraham was ‘justified’ ie declared righteous by God, because of his belief in God’s promise that he will have many descendants. Then, in Gen 22, the promise is repeated after the *Aqeda* and the ground seems to be that Abraham had not withheld his son. Then in Gen 26:5 the promise is repeated to Isaac because Abraham had obediently done God’s Will.

Thus, was the basis of Abraham’s justification his *faith* or his *works*? James links Gen 15:6 to the *Aqeda*, faith to works, in a way that is surely rooted in Jewish exegesis. Jewish exegesis reconciles apparently discordant texts and it also links texts with close verbal parallels eg Gen 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4; Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11. Thus Hab. 2:4 has *ek pisteos*, its only appearance in the Septuagint. The linking of Hab. 2:4 with Gen. 15:6 would connect with Abraham’s righteousness. The phrase *ex ergon* would thus link with Gen. 22:15; 26:5. Thus James used standard Jewish exegesis. Paul used the same exegetical tradition but his focus was that Abraham was *already justified by faith in the promise before he obeyed the command of circumcision* and became the herald of Jewish works. This solution of common tradition is better than the idea that James and Paul were interacting with one another.

Is There a Contradiction?

Sanders in 1977 saw Jewish religion as ‘covenantal nomism’ ie. Israel’s salvation is rooted in her unmerited election. Sanders claimed that first century Jewish literature showed that Judaism was *not* a legalistic religion of earning salvation by works, but rather a response to election. Dunn thus said that Paul cannot be arguing against such a position. ‘Righteousness’ thus referred to maintaining position *within* the covenant, rather than constituting a means of

entry to the covenant. This is how James viewed justification. For James, justification was *not* a Jewish idea of self-achieved works-righteousness.

For Dunn, with regard to the New Perspective, when Paul excludes justification by ‘works of the law’, he is not opposing self-achievement of righteousness by law obedience but rather ‘works of the law’ as essential Jewish markers of identity. Justification by faith means a covenant relationship for all who believe ie. trust, as Abraham did. No additions are needed. Dunn is not denying historic justification by faith. In practice, it is likely that those who saw works of the law as badges of privilege, might have slid towards a belief that somehow those works helped to justify them, alongside ‘faith.’ Is there not also a universal tendency in human beings to believe that ‘general works’ *do* in some way affect our standing before God? Paul of course was totally committed to good works as the fruit of faith – 2 Cor. 9:8; Col. 1:10.

James is not concerned in his letter about the emblems of Jewish membership of the covenant that had concerned Paul in his letter. James is concerned in his letter about works as acts of mercy and compassion, and this is outside the issue of relationships between Jews and Gentiles. Paul is committed to justification by faith *alone* and not by *any type of work whatsoever*. He does not want to modify in any way faith’s *total reliance on God*. Yet how can this be reconciled with James 2:24? Ie. ‘a person is justified by works and not by faith alone’. The phrase ‘not by faith alone’ is not a problem, since for James, faith that exists alone, apart from works, is not true faith, but merely intellectual. (2:19) Paul doesn’t speak about that type of faith, but he would agree with James on this point.

James’s phrase ‘justified by works’ is more of a problem from a Pauline angle! For James, the only valid faith is that which is completed by works ie. total trust in God, to which double-mindedness is opposed. Paul and James are agreed about true, Abrahamic faith. Those who do works in that context of faith can be relying on them for justification.

Thus, ‘when Paul says that justification is not by works, he does not have in mind at all these works done in faith. When James says that justification is by works, he does not have in mind at all the works of self-reliance which compromise faith’. (Davids p.134)

Thus James and Paul are in basic agreement.

Resolution

James and Paul have used their Jewish heritage in differing contexts -

James was concerned about the *necessity of works*. Therefore he stressed the *continuity* between faith and works. This merely continued the Jewish tradition

of stressing Abraham's faith as his continuing faithfulness to God which showed itself in works of obedience.

Paul was concerned about the need to include Gentiles in the eschatological people of God. Therefore he stressed the *discontinuity* between Abraham's faith in Gen 15:6 and his subsequent works eg. circumcision. Paul accepts that Abraham's works were done in faith, but the apostle's main concern is that Abraham *was already justified by faith in God's promise before* the acts of obedience that tested his faith. Thus Paul wants to underline that justification is by faith alone, apart from and separate from works.

Those who seriously seek to hear and do the Word of God will realize that the different messages of James and Paul 'address them in different contexts of their lives, correct the misapplications to which each can be subject, and finally cohere in the experience and the practice of relationship with God in Christ'. (Davids p.135)

James and Paul – Common Themes

Some scholars have suggested that Paul focuses on the theological and spiritual, whereas James stresses the social and economic lives of God's people. This is a false distinction. Thus, 1 Cor. 1-2 is not merely about spiritual/Gnostic issues but about social/economic status-seeking. See for example James 1:9-10a; 2:5b-6a. Paul and James were both concerned about issues of status and honour. Paul contrasted worldly wisdom eg rhetorical skill that enhanced social position, with divine wisdom from the Spirit which focussed on the status-renouncing message of the Cross. James contrasted earthly wisdom linked to competitive advantage, and wisdom from above which had socially despised qualities.(James 3:13-17). Paul addresses concrete issues of social privilege in the abuses of the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11) which are essentially the same as the rich/poor issues of James 2:2-6. *Both James and Paul* dealt with concrete social issues which today are often watered down by spiritualization in our biblical hermeneutics.

Christology

James *does* refer to Jesus as 'Lord' in 5:7,8 and also in 5:14,15. Also as 'judge' in 5:9.

Jesus is clearly divine in 5:7-11. Jesus' parousia is there in 5:7. Jesus is Lord of Glory in 2:1. James focuses on Jesus as Exalted Lord who will come as Judge. Resurrection of the Christ is presupposed in 1:1; 2:1; 5:14-15. James has a high Christology. Paul himself in his 'practical sections' does not always focus on Christ eg. in Rom. 12-13, Paul mentions Jesus Christ only 3 times. James was dealing with ethics/behaviour/attitude but his foundation is Christocentric. We

must beware of finding only differences between James and Paul in order to focus on diversity and undermine biblical theology. There is *much* that is similar and coherently consistent between the two.

Settings in James

Source: Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, Exegetical Commentary on the NT
Zondervan, 2008.

Overall Structure / Themes

According to Davids, James has three key themes –

Testing (1:2-4) ; Wisdom (1:5-8) ; Poverty and Wealth (1:9-11).

These three are then repeated in the same order –

Testing and Temptation (1:12-18)

Wisdom esp. in speech (1:19-21)

Generosity in the Poverty/Wealth gap (1:22-27)

1:26-27 is a summary and transition.

James 2:1 - 5:6 then unpacks these three themes in *reverse* order –

Poverty and Wealth 2:1-26

Wisdom; 3:1 - 4:12;

Testing 4:13 - 5:6.

James 5:7-20 is the closing section as follows –

5:7-11 summarizes the three main themes and

5:12-20 leads to the more formal closing.

Clues to the Circumstances of the Readers

When issues repeatedly crop up in a letter and are treated in some detail, it seems reasonable to infer the presence of these issues in the circumstances of these particular churches. James 1:1 identifies the letter's recipients as 'the 12 tribes in the dispersion' ie Jewish Christians outside of Israel. It seems that most or all of James's readers were literal ethnic Jews. We do not need to think of this Dispersion as only the special scattering after the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1,4). It more likely refers to Jews scattered throughout the Roman Empire as heirs to the exiling of their ancestors living under the empires of Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece and Rome. It is quite possible that James was writing his letter to both Christians and non-Christian Jews. The mention of early and

late rains in James 5:7 suggests that the readers were in the Eastern Mediterranean area and many scholars have suggested that James sent his letter to communities in and around Syria.

James 1 - It does seem that the readers faced trials and that there was a real disparity between the rich and the poor in the churches. Also from 1:26-27 there was inappropriate speech and a lack of care for the more dispossessed folk.

James 2 – This pattern is strengthened by the case of discrimination in 2:1-4 and the gap between rich and poor in 2:14-17, when the poor were ignored. In the first century Mediterranean world it is estimated that up to 10% of people were in the sort of poverty and sickness that was actually life-threatening! The ‘faith and works’ theology of 2:14-26 is thus driven by the economic need of a world much closer to our 21st century global South than to our modern, prosperous West – *cf* Paul’s need to rebuke the Judaisers in Galatia. It is likely, to Blomberg and Kamell, that James wrote this independently of, and therefore prior to, Paul’s views.

Galatians may well have been written even as early as AD 48 or 49. James the elder does not appear in early Christian literature as having any key part until the death of his namesake in AD 44. Thus James may well have been written between AD 45 and 50. Indeed, Patrick Hartin (*James* 2003, p.24) has presented 6 reasons for an early date for James –

- a) Author’s self-description in 1:1 suggests he is well known, even without any reference to his relationship to Jesus or to any special office.
- b) His close link with Israel’s heritage.
- c) The way he mentions the Jesus’ tradition – less likely after it was written down.
- d) The closeness of his spirit and outlook to Christ’s.
- e) The absence of any reference to Gentiles.
- f) No reference to Temple destruction in AD 70.

Some are unconvinced by this, but authorship by James must be prior to his martyrdom in AD 62.

James 3 – A warning that not too many become teachers – maybe because it would give them status. Even this suggests that many of the readers were poor. In 3:13-4:12 the anger, frustration and arguing might well reflect socio-economic disparity. Probably a verbal outpouring when victims of oppression felt powerless in the hands of powerful but distant people.

James 4 – Verses 13-17 probably reveals a small group of travelling merchants within the churches addressed by James.

James 5 – Verses 1-6 probably indicates absentee landlords, Roman or Jewish, who were oppressing James's church members and refusing to pay their daily wages. The Christians were very poor and needed daily payments to buy food. Some may have died of starvation as farmhands, unable to make ends meet. Some would be forced to beg or borrow and risked ending up in debtors' jails. Many would be sick and with no health care. Average life expectancy in the Roman Empire was around the low/mid 20's! James 5:13-18 was therefore very relevant to church members in that era! There are many imperatives in James and his letter carries a rhetorical genre of exhortation and prophecy. It is a mix of sermon, letter and exhortation that comes out of rational reasoning. James contrasts good and bad behavior that can be developed either positively or negatively.

Conclusions

Blomberg claims that 'With this short letter, therefore, we have what is probably the first NT document written and the first existing Christian writing of any kind of which we know'. (p.35) James was brother of Jesus and chief elder in Jerusalem from AD 44-62. Most probably he was addressing mainly Jewish-Christian churches around Syria in the mid-to-late 40's. Probably written from Jerusalem. Correct belief and correct behaviour belong together and the gospel does include a personal relationship with Jesus *and* a longing for social justice.

Many Christian folk in the Global South today live out their lives by seeking to be faithful disciples located at the margins of an unjust world. The readers of James faced the overwhelming influence of a Roman Imperial 'Gospel'. How should they react and respond to the dominance of such a power?

Two possible routes –

1. Take a line of assimilation that would threaten to destroy the unique message of the Gospel of Christ.
2. Take a line of retreat into the isolation of a kind of ghetto which might give them a sense of security but at the expense of failing to live as salt and light to the wider society.

These are not only the issues faced by the Church in the first century AD but in the 21st Century AD as well. The challenge is how believers might live peaceful but subversive lives that will transform society from within, bringing the communal and individual new life of the Kingdom of God here and now.

In James 4:13-5:6 we find a critique of those who professed faith, while at the same time drawing on the wealth of the Roman Empire. Some were foolishly hoarding wealth ‘in the last days’ (James 5:3). Dr David W Smith, writing in his book *Seeking a City with Foundations: Theology for an Urban World*, IVP, 2011, pp.204-5, argues that “James actually connects us directly to both the Jewish prophetic heritage....and to the life and ministry of Jesus, known to the author as both brother and Lord. The writer knows very well the dangers that lie in wait in cities for those whose faith is merely theoretical and conceptual and James insists on an organic connection between belief and practice; faith must *work*; it must be a living, dynamic power which results in change and transforms both individuals and communities”.

Smith (pp.204-5) suggests that “The perceived tension [faith/works] between this message and that found in the Pauline literature should not be too hastily resolved in a process of forced harmonization, but rather embraced as a divine gift to Christians inclined to become over-spiritual, providing them with a way to re-imagine ‘a more inclusive understanding of “normative” Christianity’ (The short quote is from Robert W Wall *Community of the Wise*, 1997, pp. 2-4.) Amidst the apparently invincible power of the world, the Christian community defies the temptation towards despair, conformity and discouragement, by practising a holistic faith that is sustained by love, hope and prayer.

Applicatory Issues in James -

Christians are constantly in danger of moving between the two poles of sectarian withdrawal and assimilation to the dominant culture.

Bauckham 1999 p. 174 'What is needed is for the Christian community to develop as a counter-cultural alternative to the dominant culture, in its own life together both distinctive and outgoing, shaping its members' lives, both within and without the community's own life, in ways that witness to Jesus Christ, in critical solidarity with all that is good in the dominant society and in prophetic critique of all that is corrupting and destructive.'

Bauckham goes on to argue that 'James can inform the life of such a counter-cultural community because its aim is precisely the formation and nurturing of the Christian community as counter-cultural embodiment of God's values and commandments.'

Two approaches are possible –

1. The biblical text opens up a textual world into which we as readers can enter, bringing our own experience of our contemporary context. James paints a picture of the community God is desiring and building, in contrast to what it is actually like. That community should be moving towards the perfection of itself and all things. The reconstruction of historical context is important, but not easy in James, given its broad Jewish Christian Diaspora orientation. Literary issues are likewise important but tend to be conceptual in nature rather than contextually specific.
2. The so-called 'performance model' is another approach to interpretation. ie. the meaning of Scripture emerges as we 'perform' Scripture and see transformation taking place. Bauckham challenges us all in this respect – p. 177 'In performance we cannot keep a safely detached distance from the text, but in attempting its enactment incur the risk and struggle of being the people and the communities of whom the text speaks'.

Wholeness and Integrity in James

Bauckham believes that the sevenfold occurrence of *teleios* and compounds, starting in 1:2-4, along with the seven qualities of 'wisdom' (3:17) strongly suggest that the theme of 'wholeness', 'perfection' and 'completion' is the heart of the entire letter of James. Bauckham deals with this from five perspectives, centred on the twin poles of wholeness (positive) and double-mindedness (negative) –

1. Integration

This centres on whole-hearted devotion and obedience to God. For James the whole person consists of *heart* (thoughts, feelings, will), *tongue and mouth* (words) and the *hands or whole body* (deeds). Thus, control of the tongue affects the whole body (3:2); salvation restores health to body (5:15) and soul (1:21; 5:20). James deals with community relationships – 2:13; 3:13,17; 4:11-12; 5:16,19. Individual and communal conflict are connected – 4:1. Ambition threatens relationships (3:14); peacemaking promotes them (3:18). Both the poor (1:27) and the erring (5:19-20) are vital parts of the community. Renewal is not only individual and communal, but also cosmic in scope (1:18).

2. Exclusion

Bauckham p.179 ‘Thus the wholehearted are also those whose devotion to God and his law is single-minded, excluding anything that would qualify or detract from that devotion, but the double-minded have divided loyalties, attempting to please both God and the world. They are attempting a “both...and” which cannot be true unity, but only an impossible compromise’. For James it comes down to a *Dualism*. Either we live by God’s value system or by the dominant value-system called ‘the world’ (1:27; 2:5; 4:4.). Christians cannot live under two value-systems at the same time. Thus for James, wisdom is of two types – earthly, natural and demonic on the one hand and ‘from above’ on the other. The former is self-seeking, whilst the latter seeks the welfare of others. The Christian community has values and lifestyles which are counter-cultural. This does not mean total separation from the world. Wholeness means *resisting* evil. Completion of the good requires exclusion of the evil. This is surely one of the greatest challenges for believers – ‘in the world... but not of the world’. John 17:11,14

3. Completion

This is like integration in the sense that it is a valid version of ‘both...and’ ie. wholeness is achieved by *adding* something. Thus for example, ‘not only hearing but also doing’ (1:22-25); not only ‘knowing but also doing’ (4:27). Likewise *faith and works*. Also perseverance to wholeness requires *both* endurance in testing and patience in suffering (1:2-4,12; 5:7-11).

4. Consistency

Bauckham p.181 ‘Wholeness is about the consistent devotion of the whole person, the whole of life, the whole community, and ultimately the whole cosmos to God’.

5. Divine Perfection

The Christian community can achieve wholeness and consistency *only on the basis* of God's own wholeness and consistency. James thus underlines that God is good and 'tempts no one to evil and cannot himself be tempted to evil' (1:13). God gives perfect gifts (1:17), perfect law (1:25) and perfect wisdom (3:17). These gifts *enable* wholeness of human life. See for example Lev. 19:2, Deut. 4:4-6 and Matt. 5:48. Thus if we are devoted to this world, we are idolatrous and double-minded. In a sense we are called to imitate the wholeness of God, but at the same time James reminds his readers that only God exercises judgment (4:11-12), only God opposes pride (4:6). There is thus a separation between God and humans and God desires our sense of *utter dependence* (1:9-10; 4:7,10). God *gives*, we *receive* and then we *give back* in response to God's initiative in giving to us.

Cultural Application

- 1 Western, postmodern, pluralist society does in a real sense seek wholeness, and seeks it through the channels of integration and inclusion, but is reluctant to allow any form of exclusion! In the effort to be inclusive, Western society increasingly rejects dualism, labelling it as negative. Thus, *all* philosophies are embraced as valid. 'Journeying' is very acceptable to post-modern society – but arriving at a destination is not! James by contrast seeks wholeness of humanity but by *excluding* values, attitudes and behaviours which are inconsistent with devotion to God. Wholeness, says James, can be achieved *only* in relation to a wholeness outside self ie. in God alone. James's wholeness does in fact involve a dualism between God and 'the world'.
- 2 Western society currently 'worships' openness and diversity but lacks a coherent focus – no goal, no focus of integration, no moral cohesion. For many postmodern thinkers, wholeness is an illusion and the inevitable consequence tends to be the divinization of *self* or the acceptance of the idea that life is so fragmented that we can only ever achieve virtual identity in a fragmented and increasingly meaningless world. Over the past 40 years in the West, postmodernism has gradually affected many people's mind-sets, with its positives as well as negatives. To what extent has this movement in thought and behaviour affected the populations of urban and rural areas? That is a crucial question to consider.

Community with the Poor

Serious engagement with the text requires willingness to transform and be transformed. Consideration of liberation theology in a merely rhetorical way will not in itself produce alignment with the poor or change in the situation of the poor. The key issue is not only to examine James's social context, but to consider James's theological and ethical application.

Our contemporary context in the 21st Century involves issues such as –

Globalization of market economies, dominance of transnational companies (McDonald's Restaurants, Domino's Pizzas), debt burdens of many nations, Western and now global consumerism, rich/poor gap, Western over-consumption, environmental damage, climate change.

1960 – the richest 20% of people in the world held 70% of global income and the poorest 20% got 2.3%.

1993 – the richest 20% held 85% of global income and the poorest 20% received only 1.4%.

The Identity of the Poor in James

James did not divide society into 'rich' and 'poor'. The 'rich' were a very small landowning elite. The 'poor' were not the mass of ordinary people, peasants and artisans, who could reasonably support themselves. The poor were those who lacked economic security, who were destitute or almost so, and who could only survive by stealing or begging or becoming slaves. James expected the majority of his readers not to be poor, and he seems to address the poor and the rich as other people in 2:2-7, 14-16. In 4:13-5:6 he uses direct address to two different groups of the rich in turn. The rich and poor in 2:2-3 represent the extremes of society.

In Jewish tradition, the poor were of 4 types – widows, orphans, resident aliens (sojourners) and day labourers. See James 1:27 and 5:4. James notes God's reversal of status in which He exalts the lowly and humbles the rich – see 1:9, 4:6. Status in this world brought honour, so the poor tended to be despised. The rich were considered greedy yet still received honour as patrons. Thus the rich were considered potential or actual patrons and thus received respect – 2:2-4. This evaluation is reversed in 2:6. The poor see their own utter dependence on others; the rich are comfortably atheist!

Bauckham refers to 'Those who live on the rubbish tips of Manila: these are the destitute. These most wretched of the earth are the people we must bear in mind if we are to read James appropriately to our contemporary world'. (p.191)

God's Concern for The Poor

James links 2:5 with Matt.5:3 to speak of the poor who love God as inheritors of the Kingdom. Cf. 1 Cor. 1:27-28. James 2 links to the fundamental truth of the need to love one another equally, which excludes all forms of partiality. The foundation for this is that God is love and God has no favourites.

The OT consistently links poverty with injustice. The poor in James are not simply unlucky but rather are victims of injustice perpetrated by the rich. James wants his readers to see that by tolerating and/or supporting the unjust practices of the dominant society, they too are guilty. God chose His OT and NT people out of poverty to reflect His strategy of humbling the proud, whilst exalting the poor and humble eg. 1 Sam. 2:7-8; Ps. 113:7-8. The humble find their self-worth in God's valuation and exaltation of them. In 1:10b-11, humbling of the rich could either be an ironic reference to divine judgment of them *or* an opportunity for the rich to humble themselves. Though the readers may not have been among the wealthy elite themselves, they nevertheless pandered to the status-seeking values of the 'world'. Thus the relationship between 1:9-10 and 4:6-10 is between the actually poor and those who must identify with the poor. The rich are boastful before humans and before God. The poor model human dependence on God. James does not expect his readers to become destitute like the poor, but He does demand generosity in sharing with the poor (2:15-16). Equality in the sight of God leads to genuine humility – 3:13,17 cf. Matt. 11:29.

The community of God *must* honour the poor if it claims to be truly believing – see James 1:27. Our status before God renders null and void any special claimed status before humans.

Application in Poverty Issues

It is clear that James writes about economic poverty and wealth – 2:2-3,15-16; 5:1-6. At the same time, however, Jewish tradition did attach spiritual attitudes to wealth eg. the rich feel arrogant and in control of life, whereas the poor are necessarily humble. (see Matt. 5:3; Lk. 6:20). The poor in James trust God to supply adequate material needs. The material and the spiritual are intertwined. Total 'spiritualisation' in James is dangerous.

In the contemporary West, the focus on consumerism, hedonism and debt leaves most people unconcerned about the plight of the poor. If there is to be change, then attention must be paid to the issues of the desires of the heart and the values of the dominant society.

A key issue is that of what needs to change if poverty is to be addressed – *people or structures*? James wants to see divine values adopted, rather than worldly values. His priority is...

... *not only* transformation of individuals.

... *not only* change in the structures of the dominant society.

... *but also* the formation of a counter-cultural community which displays alternative socio-economic relationships. This community resists dominant values – 2:2-3; 4:1-4; 5:19-20. The world, especially through advertising, seeks to reinforce worldly values.

Worldly values seek to replace God as the object of human devotion, thus functioning as an idol. Money is divinized and people thus become valuable only as commodities or according to their financial value and power in the market. This is currently a key issue, as it was in the different historical circumstances of James's era. James criticized those who elevated the rich and despised the poor ie. valued people on the basis of their relative position in the social hierarchy. He challenged such thinking by showing how the universal command to love (2:8) insisted on equality of treatment which reversed the mind-set of 'this world'. Idolatry can only adequately be critiqued from the standpoint of *truth from God, faith in God and love for God* all of which find their source in God Himself.

Some anthropologists have argued that in the first century Mediterranean world, goods existed in limited quantities and thus the rich could only be rich at the expense of the poor. However, James does specifically criticize the rich for their unjust treatment of the poor (5:4,6) and writes about the rich coming under divine judgment (1:10). According to Bauckham, James probably does share the common view of his times that the rich can only be rich at the expense of the poor. This presupposition is known as that of 'limited good'.

The key issue in all this is the need to distinguish between *sufficiency* and *excess*. Poverty means having less than sufficient; wealth means having far in excess of what is needed to sustain life. The contemporary Western focus on escalating standards of living and greed for excess is in stark contrast to the ancient world. The West today believes in unlimited wealth, so it is harder for the West to see the wealth of the rich as actually depriving the poor.

Western society is however now beginning to see that unlimited economic growth is not actually sustainable by the planet without catastrophic consequences. It will be crucial in the coming decades to return to the biblical model of sufficiency and for Christian communities to demonstrate that model in

practice. The poor nations will never ‘catch up’ unless the rich return to a sufficiency mind-set that turns speech and belief into living practice.

Speech in the Christian Community

This issue is as prominent as wealth and poverty in James; see 1:19-20,26; 3:1-12; 4:11-12; 5:9,12. In defining true service of God, James highlights concern for the poor (1:27) but also control of the tongue (1:26) by which the whole body is controlled (3:2). William Baker (1995:99) has even claimed, ‘James has made control of speech the premier ethical and spiritual task of man’.

In the contemporary Western world, little time is given to the ethics of speech and this undoubtedly influences the way the West generally fails to focus on that issue in James. By contrast, speech was an important issue in the ancient Near East and in the Greco-Roman world. The difference *may* be partly due to the relative importance of oral communication in the ancient world, compared with the focus on the written word in modern societies. Yet modern societies still do employ the spoken word in radio, TV, film and telephone, alongside the visual. Mass media certainly can be a force for good, but often ill, through misuse of the spoken word.

Ben Okri *Birds of Heaven* London: Phoenix 1996 p. 3-5 makes the following statement –

‘It sometimes seems to me that our days are poisoned with too many words. Words said and not meant. Words said and meant. Words divorced from feeling. Wounding words. Words that conceal. Words that reduce. Dead words.

‘If only words were a kind of fluid that collects in the ears, if only they turned into the visible chemical equivalent of their true value, an acid, or something curative – then we might be more careful. Words do collect in us anyway. They collect in the blood, in the soul, and either transform or poison people’s lives. Bitter or thoughtless words poured into the ears of the young have blighted many lives in advance. We all know people whose unhappy lives twist on a set of words uttered to them on a certain unforgotten day at school, in childhood, or at university.

‘We seem to think that words aren’t things. A bump on the head may pass away but a cutting remark grows with the mind. But then it is possible that we know all too well the awesome power of words – which is why we use them with such deadly and accurate cruelty.

‘We are all wounded inside in some way or other. We all carry unhappiness within us for some reason or other. Which is why we need a little gentleness and

healing from one another. Healing in words, and healing beyond words. Like gestures. Warm gestures. Like friendship, which will always be a mystery. Like a smile, which someone described as “the shortest distance between two people.”

Prayer in the Christian Community

James touches the theme of prayer in 1:5-8; 3:9-10; 4:2-3; 5:13-18. Apart from the references to benedictions of God in 3:9-10 and hymns of praise to God in 5:13, James’s concern is over the question of *petitionary prayer* –

- 1 This is rooted in the knowledge of God as gracious and generous giver of good – 1:5,17.
- 2 Conditions are set on what we expect to receive from God – 1:6-8; 4:3; 5:14,16.

James’s teaching on prayer is closely aligned to that of Jesus. Thus Mt 7:7 ‘Ask and it shall be given to you’. However, conditions are also involved – eg.s

1. Prayer is to be made *in faith* – Jas. 1:5-8; 5:15; Mt. 21:21-22; Mk. 11:22-24.
2. Prayer is to be according to God’s Will – 1 John 5:14.
3. Prayer is to be offered in the name of Jesus – Jn. 14:13-14; 15:16; 16:23-24; James 5:14.
4. Prayer is to be made by a righteous person – 1 Jn. 3:22; Jas. 5:15.

Unanswered prayer *might* be explained by failure to satisfy one or more of these conditions. However, they need to be seen also in the light of the fact that prayer is a two-way *relationship* with God. Prayer must take on board our response to God. It is not mechanical cause and effect, but rather an integral part of our walk with God. We must not pray like the double-minded, with various motives – 4:3-4. Their faith is half-hearted or misguided. Asking in faith means total commitment to what the believer trusts to be God’s Will.

The modern and postmodern Western mind tends to feel that humankind is master over events and thus we ourselves can control life. This leads to complacency and self-sufficiency. Human technology is felt to be the guarantee of life. Prayer is thus downgraded. As Bauckham puts it on p. 206 ‘...problems which have no solutions and desires which cannot be met are suppressed’. Some feel that prayer is a ‘spiritual technology’, with guaranteed power for those who employ it. Rather do we pray with *total dependence* on God and a realization of our own utter impotence to achieve God’s best, other than through prayer. We are very definitely *not* in control! We are not capable of making and/or possessing all things. Rather do we *receive* that which God gives us (James 1:17).

THE LETTER OF JAMES in Nine Sermons

1. James 1:1-18

Exegetical Notes

1:1

Davids believes that only James the Just, brother of Jesus, would need no other form of identification for readers to realize that this was indeed the leader of the Jerusalem Church. The people of God are in a real sense always foreigners in location and lifestyle. Servanthood is inseparable from humility.

1:2

James' humility extends to his reference to the readers as 'my brothers' ie. he may be critical of them but he also sees his own weakness – see 3:1-2.

He refers to situations such as persecution, hard moral choices and tragic experiences in life. We are to look at what *God* is doing in such situations, as we anticipate even now our future eschatological reward from God. Such a forward looking view enables present perseverance.

1:3

Even now the fruit of *Perseverance* can be seen to result from testing. The testing has 3 positive results –

- a) Suffering is required in order to yield this fruit of perseverance.
- b) Leaders in the church need stability of character and faith. Pain produces this.
- c) *We* are in good company eg with Joseph, Abraham and Job as sufferers. Paul uses the term *hypomone* ('perseverance') 16 times.

1:4

Perseverance involves the shaping of the *Whole Person* and is a process. The process of character completion cannot be short-circuited. This is *not* a reference to 'sinless perfection'. The text consists of an imperative by which the believer positively must allow this process full time, rather than wasting an experience of suffering. Davids p.46 'Perfection, then, is a tension. It is both possible and impossible, both present and future'.

1:5

A call to perfection will understandably be met with the feeling of our own inability and thus with a real sense of dependence on God through our need of wisdom and prayer. Wisdom is desperately needed in trials. Wisdom is the

equivalent of the Holy Spirit with divine origin and is mediated through Christ – see 1 Cor. 1:24; 2:4-6. Not merely ‘insight’. This is an eschatological gift. ‘Generosity’ – *haplos* – occurs here only in the NT, meaning simplicity and sincerity in the context of divine giving.

1:6

This assurance of spiritual power comes with conditions attached –

- a) James is not calling believers to hide their doubts in false pretence of assurance. He means a resolute trusting in the midst of doubt.
- b) ‘not doubt’ means doubting in general. The doubter struggles between trust of God and distrust of God. This conflict is characteristic of a divided *mind*.

1:7-8

The person with divided mind should not expect to receive anything from God. Trust must be there before we can expect anything. That person is basically unstable if he/she is keeping options open re. the object of their trust. The implied challenge is to cast ourselves utterly and solely upon the Lord Himself.

‘Double-minded’ – *dipsychos* – means that our calling to seek God with the whole heart and mind renders the double heart as basic hypocrisy. Paul refers to it as ‘walking after the flesh’.

1:9

Trust in God makes it possible to see beyond current circumstances of poverty and the social marginalisation that accompanies poverty. The word *tapeinos* generally means humble *and* poor. Such believers can nevertheless take pride in the fact that they have an assured inheritance – Matt. 5:3,5. ‘Take pride’ (*kauchaomai*) is a Pauline term (35 times) which James uses positively here re. what God has done. There is a link here between boasting and eschatological joy – see James 1:2,9,12 cf. Rom.5:3. Faith and trust shows such people that they are heirs to a universal kingdom.

1:10

The rich have all they want in this world’s security and material goods, but James seems to say they have no grounds for attributing such wealth to having received a gift from God. In James, the ‘rich’ refers to unbelievers who are outside the Christian community and who oppress the church (2:6; 5:1-6). The term ‘take pride’ is here ironic – the rich who are converted share their wealth with the poor and thus lose their status in their new position. It is in this loss that the rich can take pride! The wealth ‘bubble’ of the rich will burst in that final Day eg. Matt. 6:19-21. This only makes sense when seen from the eternal

and divine perspective. The refs. in James 2:2 and 4:13 are probably to richer church members, whilst the ‘poor’(*ptochos*) is sometimes used for the community of believers.

1:11

Palestinian flowers like the anemones and cyclamen bloom in the morning but die rapidly as the heat of the day rises. For James the rich are like flowers which look healthy but when sickness or death or loss strikes, the rich are exposed as utterly vulnerable. The rich suffer not only the struggles of the heat of the day in this life, but also face the impending judgment of God. In a sense, James now returns to 1:2-3 and assesses his points again but this time he will look at the internal dynamics of handling trials and testings, as well as considering the practical implications of faith.

1:12

God’s blessing is upon those who persevere in the trials. Testings have a goal of showing forth the reality of faith, leading to real joy. God rewards true faith. The reward of life is for all who finish the race i.e. all who love God and endure to the end. p.34 ‘Salvation has only one price, an enduring love of God’.

The term *hypomeno* – meaning ‘perseverance’ – occurs repeatedly in the NT. Endurance was vital in situations of persecution.

1:13

God does not tempt anyone nor can God be tempted by evil.

James believes God is sovereign but other forces cause evil. The Aramaic form of the prayer, however, says ‘Cause that we not enter the test’, followed by ‘and deliver us from the Evil One’. In other words ‘God is the one who *prevents the devil* from testing the Christian or sets limits on the extent of the test.

The phrase ‘God cannot be tempted by evil’ translates the phrase ‘God is *apeirastos*’ which is a very rare word. Based on its broad OT context and the form of the word, it most probably means ‘God ought not to be tested by evil men’.

1:14

Although James does believe that the devil has a role (4:7), he nevertheless affirms that temptation at core is not external eg. ‘The devil made me do it’, but rather *internal* eg. ‘I am the sinful root of this mess’. In this James agrees with Paul that the tempter is actually at root ‘evil desire within’ i.e. ‘flesh’= fallen human nature. (Rom.7:14,25) The inner voice says ‘If it feels good, do it’. For Paul the Law was not adequate – it simply highlighted the bondage of humans to sin. Paul’s answer was the Holy Spirit (equivalent in James to

‘wisdom’). Paul here followed Jewish tradition in his focus on personal responsibility.

1:15

The deviation from a position of faith and trust might not be visible but it secretly grows and eventually is revealed as sin through the triple process of *Test-Desire-Sin* (Mark 7:20-23). This eventually produces a fourth stage – *Death*. (Rom. 6:23; 7:7-12) i.e. death in the widest sense. However, James will reveal a way out in vv. 16-18.

1:16

The phrase ‘my dear brothers’ normally opens up a new paragraph. James takes a strongly pastoral approach here. He fears that his readers might drift from the faith and begin to doubt God’s goodness as a result.

1:17

The message is that God gives *good* things and not evil things. God is a gracious *giver* (1:5, 3:15). His great gift to believers is *wisdom* to be able to withstand the testing that comes from the world, the flesh and the devil. Wisdom allows and enables us to fight the evil tendencies and desires noted in 1:2-4 and 1:12-15. The character of God does not change. Though the lights are variable and changeable, God is for ever constant and therefore trustworthy. His main concern is to underline the *dependability* of God Himself.

1:18

Here, James presents further evidence of God’s goodness –

- a) God *chose* to give us birth through the word of truth. The Greek participle ‘He chose’ is in the emphatic position in the sentence. This was a deliberate, conscious choice, thus revealing the character of God.
- b) God is the cause of creation and of new creation. Desire brings about sin and death; God brings redemption and life.
- c) God did this through the Gospel of God’s work in Christ. James uses themes that are found elsewhere in Paul and John.

The idea of ‘first fruits’ shows that God will redeem humanity *and* creation (Rom 8:18-25). Indeed, the rebirth of Christian believers starts off the redemption of all creation.

Sermon Outline 1:1-18

God Gives...And Gives...And Gives.

Whenever I've advised students about opening their sermons, the standard line is to begin in a way that will attract attention! That's sometimes different from opening a sermon attractively! I struggled with a clinching opener for James 1. I recalled a sermon that began with a question – 'Hands up if you want to go to heaven'. A sea of raised hands immediately confronted the preacher, until the follow up question was posed: 'Hands up if you want to go to heaven... tonight?' Perhaps a similar question for James 1 would sound like this – 'Who wants to reach maturity as a Christian?' followed by 'Who wants to reach maturity as a Christian... whatever road the Lord takes you on?'

The opening of James 1 is pretty surprising, even shocking. He opens up a number of ideas that would tend to sink without trace, a bit like lead balloons, in much of contemporary Culture and Church – rejoice when the going gets tough; testing and trials are part of Christian life; so central are those trials that Christian maturity cannot be reached without them.

So, who are the readers of this letter? They are most probably the messianic Jewish communities of those who had responded to the message of Jesus and were then located across the Dispersion in places like Cyprus, Antioch and in other parts of Syria and Turkey. They were living as foreigners and exiles in their locations and their lifestyles – scattered, struggling, suffering and subject to temptation! That is surely just when and where it is *hardest* to live as Christians! Why was life so tough for many, if not most, of these poor believers? They were being oppressed by powerful people, especially by rich, domineering and at times dishonest, landowners. That's hard! To live in poverty or near-poverty but under the control of, and in close proximity to, the rich. Sometimes that will be our calling as ministers or missionaries! So, how are we to live out that calling?

James is very mindful that he is writing to a Community, not a bunch of individuals, with multiple relationships connecting individuals to the whole. James thus thinks and writes holistically. We need to work at that in the West!

So, what lies at the heart of this letter, this pastoral plea, this amalgam of likely sermonettes from the hand of Jesus's brother and so early on in the life of the Church? James is basically saying that *sin* is rooted in the fallen human condition and that it is this *sin* which underlies and threatens the survival of this

messianic community, this very early Church of Christ. James is very aware of the power of sin but in his closing section, 5:13-20, he shows how the death that produced sin and decay is reversed by the Spirit who becomes author of healing, life and renewal in the Messianic Community. Our calling is to persevere, continue, endure and press on *in* the midst of trials. How? In order to consider trials as joy, you must be a ‘nutcase’ in the world’s eyes! No, to consider trials as *joy* requires an act of faith. In short, not looking *at* the trial, but *through* the trial, to the final outcome of the perseverance and preservation of the community, by our growth in maturity, even through the sudden, unexpected and unwanted trials of life. This is arguably the main theme that runs right through the letter as the community focuses on the final fruit of its eschatological vision of maturity and the discovery of wisdom from God through perseverance, pressure and pain.

The main struggle of James’s readers was almost certainly their sense of being victims of economic injustice. Oppression, opposition and persecution make us feel frustrated, irritated and helpless. That leads easily to resentment and a desire to retaliate, to lash out and to look for someone to blame. It leads us very easily to blame *God* and that’s the point at which James deals with his readers.

Scot McKnight, p. 123, rightly suggests that ‘James was a pastor to a community filled with typical human questions, problems and sins’. His letter does indicate that critical questions about God were being raised by some in his congregations – 1:5 God’s response of goodness is under question; 1:13 Some feel God is temptable and tempts; 1:13 Some are failing under the testing circumstances of economic crushing/injustice and are blaming God for ‘tempting’ them in their poverty and oppression towards revenge, slander, dispute, violence and murder – 1:13-15, 19-20; 4:1-12; Some feel that God shifts around and changes like moving shadows. James turns to the nature of God that now becomes the bedrock of his entire letter -

Just what is it in the *character* of God to which we must cling, in order to persevere under the direst of tests that this world can bring?

1. God controls all things 1:18

In trials, we need to know that as God *created* all things, so He also *rules* and *controls* all things.

We are not victims of the random events and circumstances of life. We don’t even need to look beyond these immediate verses – He is Lord 1:1.

He is our only ultimate wisdom 1:5.

He decides the rising of the sun 1:11.

He determines when we live and die 1:11.

He chooses His people, brings them to life, brings them to fruit, brings them into eternity 1:12,18.

God overrules our lives and all that touches our lives. He does indeed control all things.

2. *God holds all power 1:18*

God as Creator and Sustainer exercises supreme power. ‘He chose to give us birth through the word of truth’. We could say it quickly. It could sound like a quick fix. What has the power of the Godhead achieved that humans couldn’t even dream of doing? Here’s two things for a start –

- i) Christ was raised from the dead, thus sealing our salvation a cosmic act.
- ii) He empowers new life and prepares us for future glory – that’s power.

Paul knew it – Col 1:29 ‘I labour, struggling with all *His* energy, which so powerfully works in me’. Phil 4:13 ‘ I can do everything through *Him* who gives me strength.

What has this got to do with perseverance? If God controls all things and holds all power, then He can direct or change our circumstances, and can sustain us by His power through the toughest life has for us.

3. *God gives all we need out of His great love*

He acts in love. He operates out of immense compassion. We need to know that God is not out to grind us down. This is a tough one because hard times can make us feel as if our faith is being shattered, splintered or ground down. James is emphatic that this is *not* God’s purpose in our trials. He reminds his readers that God’s purposes are precisely the opposite of those of the Enemy of God’s people. James highlights again and again that God works out His plans for us in changeless love. He is a *good and giving* God and that message is central to this whole letter. Our God is not a taking or stealing or crushing or destroying God. Let’s now trace the evidence James piles up for the Lord’s character as a *giver* for this has huge relevance for us as we give pastoral care to our people –

- a) **1:5** ‘He gives generously of His *wisdom* to all, without finding fault’. The trials we face are described by James as ‘complex’, ‘diversified’ and ‘intricate’. Same word as the victim’s experience on the Jerusalem to Jericho road – sudden and traumatic. The victim was neither expecting nor prepared for it. What happens when faith runs up against pain, sorrow or disappointment? Active perseverance is needed. Trials can be reckoned as

joy, not in and of themselves, but because of what they will yield. This is profoundly counter-cultural thinking – it's biblical thinking! God promises to *give* wisdom – to see God as involved in all of life and to know *how* to move forward in trials. By prayer, we are invited to seek wisdom from God to understand something of the meaning and purpose of our trials and to understand God's goodness. There is a growing consensus of scholars and commentators who strongly believe that wisdom in James functions as a gift of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit Himself.

The condition attached in vv 6-8 is crucial. If we are to persevere in trials, to move forward in trials, we must be loyal to God and desirous of His Will alone for our lives. Double-minded doubt is condemned – leaving the door open to try to get our way; trying to work things out in our way; leaving parts of our lives vulnerable to the inroads of the world, the flesh and the devil. Single-minded trust in God is the condition and God will respond to His community's pleas by His single-minded generosity! What God is looking for through the trials faced by James's community is a growing confidence in God and His purposes, together with a morally mature character and community among believers that will glorify God.

- b) **1:12** God gives the *crown of life* to those who love Him and who persevere under trial. Perseverance will be a mark of those who love God. Our goal is to love God, not the things of this world which are passing and meaningless vv 9-11. We are to live this life in light of eternity. The crown is not a reward for perseverance in itself but God's fulfillment of His promise to those who love God. Love for God is the foundation and fuel for endurance.
- c) **1:17** God gives *every good and perfect gift*. This text is the culmination of James's argument in vv 13-16 and it again concerns God's character. The Greek word *peirasmos* can mean 'trial' and 'temptation'. Trials can trigger perseverance or despair. The response lies in our attitude. James is saying, as it were, look, let's get this straight – such is the sovereignty, power and holiness of God that He cannot be tempted or seduced or persuaded to damage us. The temptation to give up or despair in testings and trials is *not* from God. It is rooted (vv. 14-16) in our own sinful nature. Make no mistake, says James, if we listen to and follow our own corrupt hearts, the sequence is certain – desire, disintegration, decline, death. If we persevere, with love and trust in God, the result is maturity, completion, life, in the community of Christ.

Every good gift is from God v. 17. After all, says James, He's your loving heavenly Father – He doesn't give trash, He doesn't make mistakes, He is

not the author of temptation in trials, He does have a purpose that trials be a platform for perseverance and maturity. He functions out of compassion. If there are still any doubts among the readers of this ancient letter about God's goodness and love, then James puts the matter beyond all question with His final example of the power of this 'giving God' –

d) **1:18** God gives birth to His Church *through the word of truth*. Here James reaches the watershed of his argument and answers the pressing questions of those undergoing trials – Can I get through this? Will my faith be intact or shattered? Can I persevere right to the end? Does this Christian faith actually work?

In a series of stunning statements, James delivers the divine answer –

- i) In v.12 we are given absolute assurance that there is a way forward to the crown of life. We are to persevere out of love for this good and compassionate Father'
- ii) Then comes the depressing news in vv. 14-15. How can we even approach God, let alone persevere in trials out of love for God when our hearts are so corrupt, our natures so fatally flawed and stained and marred by the sin that traps and ensnares us so often.
- iii) The answer of James actually *is* the message of the gospel – God chose to do it. He could have chosen *not* to do it! To give us a new heart, a new start, a new life, a new birth, through the word of truth. He chose to do it – out of His giving love and sheer goodness. We now live, not under the control of our corrupt nature but rather in union with Christ, living out His powerful resurrection life by the Holy Spirit within the community of Christ. That's ultimately how perseverance works. It works by His power!

Our incentive to persevere in testings lies in the character of God and in His completed work in Christ. This is at the same time what makes perseverance possible – it is a challenge *and* a comfort at the same time. James sets out in chapter one the demands *and* the resources he expects his readers to face as he explains them through the rest of his letter. Perseverance is not pointless – it is precious and painful. Our progress in perseverance rests of our belief in the love of God, the goodness of God, the wisdom of God and the power of God. Our perseverance in trials is ultimately our evidence that God has brought us to birth, is continuing His Spirit's work in us and will bring us by grace to full and final glory.

2. James 1:19-27

Exegetical Notes

1:19

James has talked about wisdom that comes from God in 1:16-18. Now he moves to the qualities of a wise person. *Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.* James and the NT are special in that they do not advocate actual silence. The wise person listens to others, prays and considers and then carefully speaks. This is a severe warning to individuals and groups.

1:20

Human anger does not lead to the righteous life required by God. Angry feelings easily rise up into angry actions. See the disaster of uncontrolled anger in Exod. 2:11-16 when Moses murdered the Egyptian. The Christian response ought to be humility and endurance – see James 5:7-9. Anger was unacceptable to Jews and to Greeks, but Paul advocated the need, not to repress anger, but to admit it and deal with it through four possible mechanisms - confrontation, reconciliation, forgiveness and prayer – ‘before the sun sets’.

1:21

Therefore get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent. James starts with the negative ie. the need to recognise and deal with sin. He uses the concept of conversion here. Every element of malice needs to be put aside. Once this is done, then the *word planted in the heart* can bear fruit in a transformed life. In fact ‘accept’ is the main verb and ‘get rid’ is a participle. This commitment involves *humble* submission. The word is implanted by God at conversion but must grow through obedience – Deut. 30:1; Matt 13:4-15, 18-23; 1 Cor 3:6; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:13.

The NIV translates the ‘soul’ as ‘you’ but the term *psyche* does mean the whole person or self. James is interested in addressing the total transformation of the total person – mind, body, soul, spirit, emotions, relationships, life.

1:22

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Obedience to the word, plus resulting actions, are what really counts. The teachings of Jesus was the ‘new law’ for believers – Rom 8:2; 1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2. The readers deceive themselves ie. regarding their state of salvation. The Greek term ‘listen’ means serious attention and study.

1:23-24

James illustrates his point about ‘doing the word’ by using a mirror analogy. A person checks himself/herself in the mirror in the morning but the person *forgets what he looks like* as the day progresses. There is a breakage in the link between the knowledge gained through the mirror and the knowledge of the face which is lost through the rest of the day. The connection is broken. All our knowledge of Bible and theology is meaningless unless it is taken into ‘the rest of the day’ and translated into action.

1:25

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he will be blessed in what he does. The focus here is on study, action and continuation in this process. The key for James is *continued, consistent* obedience to the commands of Christ in a consciously chosen lifestyle. The perfect law here means the Jewish Scriptures, interpreted and completed by Jesus’ teaching. Freedom is the living and fulfilling of the law of Christ eg. Gal 5:13, 6:2. This freedom must be lived and not merely learned. Such blessing is NOT temporal prosperity but future joy when the kingdom of God is fully set up.

1:26

James is not judgmental *per se* but adds *and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.* There must be an ethical lifestyle. If not, then the religious forms become *self-deception*. James condemns anger, complaining, criticism, judging and gossiping. James wants his readers to see these sins as evidence of a failure to be ruled by Christ. Change is invited *now* before it is too late. The adjective ‘religious’ appears only here in the NT.

1:27

True religion is *looking after orphans and widows in their distress and keeping oneself from being polluted by the world.* If God is Father of the orphan and husband to widows, then His very character would demand the practice of charity from those who claim to live under His rule.

Believers are not to conform to the ‘world’ ie. to the human culture, mores and institutions. They must avoid material ambitions and competition that produce little charity and much chaos and conflict in society – James 4:1-4.

James concludes (Davids p.43) that ‘Conversion is meaningless unless it leads to a changed life’.

Sermon Outline 2: 1:19-27

Living Out the Christian Life: Hearing and Doing the Word

Key contextual verse 18 – ‘God has given us birth through the word of truth so we might be first fruits of God’s creation ie the word *must* affect the lives we live. The immediate consequence is verse 19 – listen long, speak ‘slowly’ and avoid the anger that fails to produce a godly, righteous life. *Because* anger doesn’t lead to a righteous life, *therefore* resist all moral filth and evil and humbly bow to God’s implanted word. Don’t simply *listen* to the word 1:22. Don’t slide into *self-deception* but rather *do* the word! The word of truth is a key theme of James 1:19-27. It is not merely intellectual but is radically transformative in result!

James then expands this with an everyday, practical illustration – don’t be like someone looking into a mirror and then forgetting what he/she looks like cf. looking into the *word* and making sure we don’t forget it, but rather actually doing the word. Listen to the perfect law that gives freedom. The result will be blessing – 1:25. James then asks the question What is pure religion? 1:27. His answer is that it means caring for orphans/widows and remaining unstained from this world.

Such an authentic view of true religion is in marked contrast to ‘worthless’ religion. Interestingly James applies this challenge to those who claim to be ‘religious’, yet are indulging in a second form of self-deception, namely failure to keep a tight control over the use of his/her tongue. Speech can be devastating!

Surely we need to hold in our minds and hearts James’s strong pastoral concern here in 1:19 ‘my dear brothers’. At the same time James starts to develop his thought on a range of sins that stem from his statements about evil, human desires as the root of temptations and sinful acts (1:14-15). He seems to run two parallel lines of argument to illustrate what he has already introduced in 1:1-18.

Avoid – Damaging use of the tongue -1:19

- take care to listen to what people, especially those in the messianic community, have got to say. We need to fight the strong temptation to be the first to speak and ‘get our oar in’ before anyone else opens their mouth!

- Be slow to speak but weigh your words after careful thought and prayer. Critical, unfair and spiteful words can do huge damage that can be very slow indeed to heal in the person targeted. ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me’ – not true in many situations! Hasty or inappropriate words can inflict untold pain that will give long-term pain in another person’s life. This sort of speech is not the will of God and should be avoided like the plague.

The vital bridge – Put off all manner of evil behavior and put on the word planted in you, which can save you, but do it with humility.

Adopt – The Road that leads to the *righteous* life –

- this must be rooted in the word of God. How easy it is to preach sermons or listen to sermons and yet to do so without any serious intention to follow through with wholehearted transformation and obedience. In short, just as we can look in a mirror and see our faces but then move into the day and forget what we look like, so it is frighteningly easy to hear the Word but rapidly forget it and live in a simply human or carnal way.
- 1:22-25 is a call to *listen* and *do the Word*. Believers can so readily fall into the real trap of deceiving ourselves that we are living the righteous life but are actually not putting the Word into practice.
- We can look at ourselves in a mirror on a Sunday morning and then look at, and listen to, the Word of God an hour later. Even by lunchtime it is entirely possible to forget both! We can forget the Word or fail to put it into practice. By Monday morning it can simply be ‘history’!
- Our calling is to look seriously and deeply into the life-giving and freedom-giving Scriptures. Spirit and truth will work in tandem to change us. This requires discipline and acquired knowledge. Beware of the increasing biblical illiteracy of our 21st Century, especially in the Western world and Church. Don’t be like the contestant a few years ago on ‘Who wants to be a Millionaire?’ who missed out on £125,000 when he failed to answer the Bible Question ‘Matthew is one of our NT Gospels. Name one other. Is it a) Mark. b) John. c) Genesis. d) Luke?’ The contestant left the stage with a heavy heart and confessed that if he had listened to his grandmother years ago and had gone to Sunday School, then surely he would not have given the answer ‘Genesis’. He would also have been a richer man today, he pondered!

James finally presents two further practical examples of true religion and truly righteous living –

v.26 Watch the words that come out of your mouth! James touches again a major theme of his letter. It may well have been the case that the poor messianic community, addressed by James, was strongly tempted to use impulsive and unpleasant language in an effort to grab and impose justice for their unfair treatment by the rich. James offers an alternative for a *believer's speech*.

v.27 Care for widows and orphans! James disallows anyone from listening to the Word and then walking away unmoved or unchanged. A challenge to hearers *and* preachers! The works demanded by James, the likely brother of Jesus, include the strict control of the tongue, acts of compassion and attitudes/acts of holiness.

3. James 2:1-13

Exegetical Notes

2:1

Partiality violates the character of God. Jesus' own life, teaching and example downplayed social/economic standing. Faith in, and commitment towards, the Lordship of Christ is our only standard of acceptance for the people of God. The likeliest best translation of the Christ reference is 'our glorious Lord Jesus Christ'. Christ is shown as the expression of God's glory in His OT saving acts and His NT coming deliverance for the eternal world.

2:2-4

The rich man is honoured: the poor man insulted or ignored. Interestingly James does not use the Greek word 'rich' since, by his usage, 'rich' referred to pagans. This is a picture of a church court assembly, trying a dispute between them. If it were a worship situation, all would stand or sit, and would have more carefully prescribed roles. The assembly would be concerned not to offend the rich man in this dispute.

James is not pleased –

- a) 'You have discriminated among yourselves'. They deny the equal status of believers by elevating one above the other on the basis of wealth and worldly status.
- b) '..become judges with evil thoughts'. Because they covet the rich man's wealth, they exercise discrimination, thus defying the way God Himself operates. Eg. Lev.19:15.

The warning applies more generally to church behaviour eg. choice of leaders based on status, preferential seating in church/social gatherings, power of large church donors.

2:5

Jesus came especially for the poor – Lk. 4:18; 6:20. The requirements of receiving the promise are poverty AND love for God ie. poor people who acknowledge their dependence on God. The ‘kingdom’ in Mt 25:34; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21, is equal to ‘salvation’.

2:6-7

Any church that shames the poor is functioning outside the Will of God – Prov. 14:21; 1 Cor 11:22. The rich oppress the church, yet the church bows to the rich

- a) The rich are exploiting them. The rich disobeyed the law by charging high interest on loans to the poor – Exod. 22:25-26. If the rich encountered legal problems, they could afford to hire the best lawyers!
- b) The rich are *dragging you into court*. If the poor could not repay a loan, a legal case would be brought by the rich.
- c) The rich are *slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong*. The rich were mocking the Christian status of the poor.

The tragedy was that the church, by supporting the rich, was also insulting the poor believers. The church *and* the rich were both guilty of oppressing the poor believers! Interestingly, James now uses the plural form of ‘the rich’ – *oi plusioi* – to refer to the class outside the church who are being imitated by the church body.

2:8-9

James argues that the believers need to keep the *royal law* ie. the law of the kingdom that operates under the rule, authority and kingship of Jesus. See 2:5 also. This refers to OT law as interpreted by Jesus eg. Mt 5-6. *Love your neighbour as yourself* is foundational to Jesus’ teaching (Lev 19:18 is quoted 6 times in the Synoptics) and love for the poor is specifically mentioned in Prov. 14:21. On this basis, the church is guilty of the sin of showing favouritism. Notice how James is not afraid to use the word ‘sin’ to describe the church’s handling of the poor.

2:10

For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. If a person breaks one law, then that indicates an attitude toward the law-giver – see Deut. 27:26. Thus the person comes under a curse.

In this way James shows the seriousness of any law-breaking and at the same time shows how fundamental human rebellion is the real issue, rather than the breaking of specific commandments.

2:11

God gave both laws and it is not possible for a person to obey the one but disregard the other! The focus on murder might be linked with the biblical idea of murder as lack of love and as failure to care for the poor - see Amos 8:4.

2:12

James shows his great concern for the complementary exercise of *speech* and *action*. Judgment will be *by the law that gives freedom*. This is the law that yields blessing if obeyed and amounts to the OT law as viewed by Jesus. This delivers believers from the bondage of sin and produces life rather than legalism. Why do believers who know the freedom and grace of God sometimes slide into legalism? Why do legalists burden others? Do legalists feel they need exact prescription in all of life because they suffer basic insecurity and need to know exactly what should be done in every situation eg. *twice* to church, not once, on a Sunday? Catastrophe awaits those who miss a Quiet Time on a certain day? Insecure believers impose legalism/false guilt on others to bolster themselves.

James links judgment with words spoken in 1:19; 3:1-12; 4:11-16; 5:12 and links judgment with actions in 1:27; 4:1-10; 5:1-6. He seems to be able to blend living by grace with living by ethical standards.

2:13

He now strengthens his argument by a biblical line of reasoning. *Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful*. If we fail to show mercy, we thus act outside the will and covenant of God. This brings us under the judgment of God.

James has used logic and biblical argument to show that love and justice require right treatment of the poor. Now he adds that mercy and fear of judgment are the final incentives! Indeed *mercy triumphs over judgment* ie. when believers show submissive obedience to God, then such mercy overcomes judgment. The exercise of *mercy* will eliminate *both* our judging of others *and* God's judgment of ourselves.

In **2:14-26** James follows through the issue of care by the church for the poor. He uses the same kind of structure that he used in 2:1-13 – topic verse, example, logical argument, two-part argument from Scripture.

If we are being transformed by God, then we should be showing practical mercy. Judgment is *strict*, but mercy is *powerful*. It means not giving to others because they deserve help, but giving to others who have no claim whatsoever on the giver eg. Good Samaritan. Because mercy is an attribute of God, then followers of Christ should possess evidence of that divine quality in their own lives.

2:12 stresses that all speech and action must finally be accounted for. Cranfield in his commentary reminds us that we must be careful not to become so obsessed by the picture language of judgment that we forget the reality that such language actually portrays! God's Will for us is the 'law of liberty'. Cranfield writes that it is God's good and holy law, of which Christ is the goal, meaning and substance. Cranfield concludes that James is not contradicting justification by faith but rather is reminding us that – '...the absence of compassion for one's fellow men is conclusive proof that one's professed faith is counterfeit, while mercy shown – though certainly not to be thought of as a meritorious work putting God under an obligation – may be an evidence of genuine faith'.

Sermon Outline 3. 2:1-13

Justice and Fairness in all Relationships: The Rich and the Poor

James continues in pastoral mode with his address in 2:1 to 'my brothers' and if we switch our eyes to the other end of this passage, we see essentially one of the key themes that runs through the whole letter – 'speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom' (2:12). The material in 2:1-13 basically breaks down into three crucial points, cemented together by the closing challenge to his readers enshrined in 2:12-13. Let's see just how this unfolds –

- a) *Don't show favouritism* vv.1-4. James pleads for action that is rooted in the believing community's discipleship to the Lord Jesus Christ. Don't act in bias or clear discrimination against the poor in favour of the rich. How tempting it is to favour members of our churches who are successful, wealthy or least likely to create trouble/problems for us in our task of leadership of the church. This must not happen in the messianic community of Christians. Such attitudes and acts are rooted in evil, human nature, as James has already explained in 1:21, although we might not even think of bias or favouritism as being within the category of

‘evil’! To what extent do social or economic class factors influence the welcome we tend to give to visitors to, or members of, our churches?

b) *Don’t insult the poor* vv. 5-7. James again pleads with his ‘dear brothers and sisters’ in the Christian community. He stresses that God has favoured the *poor* in His choice of those who inherit the Kingdom he promised to those who love Him. Some members are actually guilty of insulting the poor in at least three ways – i) The rich are economically exploiting the poor. ii) The rich are dragging the poor into court. iii) The rich are slandering the name and honour of the One to whom the poor owe their ultimate allegiance, namely Christ. Strong words indeed!

c) *Don’t despise the Law* vv. 8-11. If you keep the Royal Law of Scripture – the law of the Messianic King – which stresses ‘loving neighbour as yourself’ – then you’re doing right. By contrast, if you show bias and favouritism, you are actually breaking this law. We are called to uphold the *whole* law. James illustrates his point by the prohibition of murder and adultery. If a person avoids committing adultery, but commits murder, then they are guilty of breaking the law.

James concludes this section of his argument by returning to his parallel statement in 1:25, concerning the law that gives freedom. He virtually says in 2:12-13 what he has already said in 1:25-27, namely that the believing communities must make sure that speech and action always must *both* be jointly present and powerful. If that happens, there will be *blessing* for those who do speak and act rightly (1:25); James goes a step further in 2:12-13 where he adds a severe warning that if we fail to speak *and* act in a godly and righteous way, then we will be subject to the judgment of the law that gives freedom. More than that, if we fail to show mercy, then we will face only judgment that holds no hope of mercy whatsoever. James has now opened the way to focus on the centrality of ‘works’. James 2:13 is the key link verse into a deeper teaching on ‘works’. Meanwhile, Matt 7:21-23 provides a sober reminder that many will believe themselves to be saved, having even prophesied, expelled demons and executed miracles in Jesus’ name, *and yet* Jesus affirms that He never knew them! What such people lacked was personal knowledge and experience of Christ, a changed life and the deeds that proved the authenticity of their faith. Such folk live today!

4. James 2:14-26

Exegetical Notes

2:14

What good is it...if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? The answer expected by James is clearly ‘No good whatsoever!’ ‘Faith’ here means orthodox belief with usual expression, as in the use of ‘religion’ in 1:26.

Can such faith save him? The implication is that if there is no evidence of transformation, then there is no evidence of salvation.

Paul says that the purpose of salvation is ‘good works’ (Eph 2:10).

2:15-16

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. We know that in the 40s and 50s, Judea repeatedly experienced famine and starvation.

The one in need approaches a church member and asks for help, but the church member responds ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed’, yet *does nothing* about the physical needs of the person. There is a real danger of salving our conscience by offering to pray, when in fact we should be taking action.

2:17

Davids p.65 ‘The example was a specific example of orthodox language and intellectual belief without gospel obedience’ Paul called for ‘faith expressing itself through love’ (Gal 5:6) rather than ‘religious ritual works’. ‘For James it is faith that leads to action that saves’. Works are *not* an optional extra.

2:18

But someone will say ‘You have faith; I have deeds’. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. James here anticipates an objection to his argument. The person objects by arguing that faith and works are *different gifts* eg. faith is a gift but so are works – Rom. 12:8. Maybe an individual, who we would not expect to be a healer AND a prophet, should not be expected to possess the gifts of faith *and* works!! James argues back with a challenge to prove that true faith is even possible without works. Faith and love are indeed inseparable (1 Cor. 13:2). It is the real faith that triggers the works which in turn show the reality of the faith. The visible works are the manifestation of the ‘invisible’ faith.

2:19

This is the starting point for all Judeo-Christian faith – see the Shema of Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num. 15:37-41, Mk.12:28-34; Rom. 3:30. Even for the Jew, the Shema was supposed to lead to the keeping of the law as a way of demonstrating faith. James commends such belief, but immediately qualifies it by saying that even demons are orthodox in belief – see Mk 1:24; 5:7; Acts 16:17; 19:15 – but *shudder* – because they are in a state of rebellion against that very God! The demons' faith does *not* lead to obedience and works.

2:20

Do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? It sounds as if the person has a moral unwillingness to accept James's argument, so James pushes ahead to substantiate his argument. The word 'useless', with reference to faith without deeds, is a word meaning 'sterile', 'unproductive', 'useless' (Mt. 12:36; 20:3,6; 1 Tim. 5:13; Titus 1:13; 2 Peter 1:8)

2:21

Abraham was *considered righteous* and James here uses language to mean 'declared right by God' or 'considered righteous by God'. Paul uses the same language to mean 'make [a sinner] right'. James's usage emerges from Gen 22:12 in which we read a declaration of righteousness. Thus there is a difference between Paul's use (making righteous) and James's use (declaring/pronouncing righteous). It was the *action* of Abraham offering up his son Isaac that pointed to the reality of his faith.

Gen 15:6 states *Abraham believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness*. Gen 15:6 was thus seen as an anticipated declaration in the light of following actions which indicated true faith i.e. God steps in to abort the sacrifice because He acknowledges Abraham's righteousness. Then in Gen. 22:12 God says *Now I know that you fear God..*' In other words Abraham had lived out his faith and this had led to righteous actions which eventually were recognised/declared by God as righteous.

2:22

His faith and his actions were working together. Alt. *his faith worked with his actions.* This raises the issue of the origin or source of Abraham's faith. Jewish traditions eg. Jubilees 11-12 claim that Abraham had lived in a pagan culture but had viewed nature and concluded that there was one God.

His faith was made complete by what he did. His faith moved to maturity through his actions – see 1:4, 15. The two are inseparable – 'faith informs and motivates action; action matures faith'. (Davids p.69)

2:23

James puts forward two thoughts here –

a) *and the scripture was fulfilled that says ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness’*. Paul uses this text in Rom. 4:3 and Gal. 3:6 but sees it differently from James. Paul says that Abraham believed God and was declared righteous *before* his circumcision i.e. *before* he kept the ritual law. James sees these two parts of the statement as separate i.e. Abraham had faith that God was one *and* God declared him righteous, Abraham demonstrating his faith through acts of charity. Thus both parts of the sentence are true.

The idea of Scripture being fulfilled is not in terms of prophetic prediction, but rather the idea that the Scripture agrees with the biblical narrative. The idea of *Abraham believed God* was common in Jewish tradition. ‘Crediting as righteousness’ is passive in the Greek OT but active in Hebrew i.e. ‘he accounted it to him [as?] righteousness’. James viewed this as active – Abraham’s faith is thus the first part of the sentence and ‘he accounted him righteous’ is the second part. Accounting meant for James’s era, the idea of entry into the heavenly books.

b) *and he was called God’s friend*. Abraham, as God’s friend, must have had an active, obedient and faithful faith, not just an intellectual belief.

2:24

You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone.

The opener ‘you see’ was second singular in 2:18,19,20,22, but here becomes plural.

James is still writing to the ‘brothers’ of 2:14 and here we hit a problem – James here seems to be in conflict with Paul in Rom 3:28 ‘For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law’ cf. Rom. 3:20. James view needs careful examination –

a) *by what he does* James sees this as acts of love, such as those in 1:27. Paul focuses on observing the ritual law eg’s circumcision, diet, sacrifices. However, Paul also was convinced that believers should act in love and charity eg. Eph. 2:10 and could not be counted as saved unless there was evidence of these acts eg. Gal. 5:19-21; Rom. 1:28-32.

b) *a person is justified* Davids feels this is a weak translation of *dikaiooutai*. The latter is a third person singular Present Passive tense, meaning ‘is being justified/ counted righteous’. According to Davids, to translate this ‘a person is justified’ tends to impose Paul’s usage on James i.e. the idea of the forgiveness which repentant sinners receive at God’s judgment seat

when they trust Christ. Davids argues that James is using an older understanding of the term – ‘a person is declared to be righteous by God’ or ‘is considered righteous by God’ and this ‘on the basis of what he does’ (and not on the basis of what ideas he agrees to). But surely Davids is trying to say here that the person is counted righteous by his/her yielding to Christ in faith – which is what Paul says! What does Davids mean by ‘on the basis of what he does’? This still seems unclear. My view - Surely James could be saying in 2:24 that a person is *continually* being reckoned as righteous by God as long as he/she is displaying works as evidence of faith. In other words, faith and works are *so connected* that they can be viewed together. There is no point in a person claiming to be justified by faith if there is no evidence of works.

- c) *not by faith alone* According to Davids, the difference here is that Paul views faith as ‘personal commitment to Christ that leads inevitably to obedience because one is convinced that Jesus is Lord’, whereas for James it means ‘by intellectual belief that God is one’ or ‘that Jesus is Lord’. Paul is concerned to show that one is not saved by ritual actions. Davids says Paul would never separate faith and actions the way James does, except to refute such a separation (Rom 6-8). Davids p.70 – ‘Therefore, though Paul uses ‘alone’ with ritual works (Rom. 4:16), James uses it with faith to show its illegitimate total separation from action’. James in brief says that God will declare righteous only those whose faith leads to obedient action. Paul would surely agree with this. Luther favoured Paul in this conflict but Davids feels Luther ‘was reading Paul’s meaning backwards into James’ i.e the real issue is that James was using words differently than Paul. Prior to AD 49, James might *not* have heard Paul’s teaching on this subject. The crux for Davids revolves around three Greek terms –
 - i) *ergon=work, act* James sees this as *acts* of compassion, whereas Paul always connects this term with ‘law’ ie. ritual acts, except in Gal.5:19 and 6:4 where it is used positively.
 - ii) *Dikaioo=justify* James uses this term as does the Septuagint 44 times – ‘declared to be right by God’, whereas Paul means ‘put right with God’. If Paul’s meaning is read into James, there will be real confusion.

iii) *pistis=faith* James uses this term to mean ‘true commitment’ (2:5), ‘Christianity’ (2:1) and ‘intellectual belief’ (2:14-26). His problem is with the third type of ‘faith’ and then only if unconnected with works (*faith alone*) . Paul normally uses ‘faith’ to mean ‘true commitment’ and ‘Christianity’, which includes the actions spoken about so passionately by James.

Thus James follows Mt. 7:15-21 i.e. only heart obedience is proof of a real faith that will stand the test of the final judgment. Paul actually agrees! – see 1 Cor. 13:2; 2 Cor. 9:8; Gal. 5:6; 6:4; Eph. 4:17ff.; Col. 3:5ff.

2:25

Paul now uses a second illustration, namely, Rahab the prostitute – see Joshua 2:1-21 and Heb. 11:31. *Considered righteous* is a suitable translation. In Josh. 2:9-10, Rahab confesses faith on the grounds of what God had done for Israel. Such faith was not enough to deliver her. She gave *lodging to the spies* and then sent *them off in a different direction*. She risked her life and Heb. 11:31 acknowledged her faith-based action. When she exercised her faith in action, then she was considered by the spies to be righteous. Her faith was one of action and so she became an ancestor of David and Jesus.

2:26

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead. James brings together 2:14 and 2:17 for his conclusion. The words for breath and spirit are the same in Greek and Hebrew (*ruah* and *pneuma*). Thus, when a person gave up his spirit or breathed his last, then that person was dead – see Jn.19:30; Lk. 23:46; Eccles. 3:21; 8:8; 9:5. Christians treated the corpse as without value but the corpse would eventually be transformed in a resurrected body. A dead body needed to be buried; likewise intellectual belief alone is dead and without value. Indeed it can deceive a person re. their future destiny. Intellectual faith alone does not save. It is the faith that yields action that lasts. Faith and works are thus combined together in an inseparable relationship.

Sermon Outline 4 2:14-26

Faith and Works: The Nature of the Gospel of Justification

Having worked through his arguments thus far, James is now ready to make an overt statement about the waste of faith claims, unless there are attendant works to validate the faith (2:14). To make his point even clearer, he uses the example of professing believers who are happy to wish needy folk well, in terms of food and clothing for them in their poverty, but then failing to provide practically and physically for those needy people! Such ‘faith’ is to be considered dead! (2:15-17).

James then deals with a possible counter-argument, namely the idea that there is a choice between faith and works. You don’t necessarily need both! (2:18) James is ready to press home his point that faith is only valid if evidenced by works. Belief in one God is commended by James but is immediately qualified as being insufficient on the grounds that such a doctrine is believed even by demons who actually tremble in that belief! (2:19) James is relentless in driving home his claim to the absolute necessity of faith *and* works operating together and he presses it even further in the following few verses!

James now underlines how ridiculous and foolish it is to think that faith has any value whatsoever, unless it is backed up by accompanying works. He backs up his case by calling on selected and specific OT evidence of specific characters –

2:21-23 *Abraham and Isaac*. Abraham was counted righteous for his *act* of offering his son Isaac on the altar. In the case of Israel’s great ancestor, Abraham, faith and works operated together, the latter completing the former. Scripture was fulfilled by Abraham *believing* God and that faith being credited to him as *righteousness* (Genesis 15:6). Abraham was indeed God’s friend! Then comes in 2:24 that controversial claim of James that a person is justified by what he *does* and not only by *faith*. So tightly and inextricably are faith and works tied together that both are counted as vital in the justifying/saving purposes of God. James is adamant about this in 2:24!

This is a vital place to stop and reflect. Paul in Romans 5:1 states that ‘..we have been justified by faith...’ and the apostle refers to Abraham’s point of justification way back in Genesis 15:6 when God promises numerous descendants to Abraham. Following that covenant promise, ‘Abraham believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness’. Subsequent to that justification, Abraham years later in Genesis 22, demonstrated his justifying faith in God by his willingness to place his son Isaac on the altar. Abraham showed the reality of his faith by this particular ‘work’, out of obedience to God. James is dealing with a very different context of professing believers who were chronically failing to do works. On the contrary they were persecuting and victimizing the poor and marginalized and in this context, James insists that they prove and validate their claimed faith by showing the ‘works’ evidence of a changed life. Paul said in effect ‘we are saved by faith’. James said ‘this is what saving faith looks like’. Paul and James both fundamentally believed in faith *and* works, like two sides of the same coin. They were actually not in conflict; they were writing in different contexts and to different readers.

2:25 *Rahab*. In a similar way to Abraham, Rahab the prostitute was counted ‘righteous’ by her action of offering lodging to the spies and sending them off in a different direction.

2:26 In a similar way to James’s strong conclusion in 2:13 on the subject of judgment and mercy, as he closed the section 2:1-13, so here in 2:26, at the end of 2:14-26, he makes a highly uncompromising statement about ‘death’. So serious is the connection between *faith* and *deeds* that James can assert that the absence of that relationship is like having a body without the spirit. Both situations amount to the same thing – hopeless helpless and endless death. It is that serious! Yes, we affirm the centrality of salvation by grace through faith, but yes also, we are committed to the place of works that validate our saving faith. Both Paul and James affirm this balance. They also teach that the absence of works in a professing believer’s life should sound alarm bells ringing because Scripture does warn of the danger of judgment and of spiritual death.

5. James 3:1-12

Exegetical Notes

According to Davids, James's church was a church of the Spirit, without formal ordination for teaching/preaching ministry. Therefore this tended to attract the wrong type of teachers into church ministry. These uncalled teachers became critical of others and this attracted criticism from those they criticised. Thus James focuses on the tongue, Spirit orientation and worldliness.

3:1

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly. There are temptations of power, prestige and position for those who teach in the church. There was a *high responsibility* on teachers, in light of judgment, to *live godly lives* – see Mt. 12:36; 23:1-33; Mk. 12:40; Luke 20:47; Jude; 1 Tim. 3; Titus 1. Davids p. 80 'Teachers were primarily models, secondarily intellectual instructors'.

Prophets spoke by direct inspiration from God, but teachers interpreted and applied scripture and developing Christian tradition. Dangers however of pride, self-sufficiency, arrogance and self-praise. Cf. Paul's concern about future judgment for teachers – 1 Cor. 9:27. James's phrase *you know* shows that the church was aware of especially severe judgment for teachers.

3:2

We all stumble in many ways is an honest statement of our proneness to sin but at the same time it warns us of the perils we are at and that the church therefore risks through our lives and ministries. (Rom. 8:46; 1 Jn. 1:8) James uses the word 'stumble' twice out of its NT uses – James 2:10; 3:2; Rom 11:11; 2 Peter 1:10. It means to go astray morally or to be ruined. *If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check.* The hinge issue is control of the tongue – see Prov. 10:19; 21:23; Eccles. 5:1. Purity of speech is one of the hardest goals to achieve. It is so central that James uses the phrase *His whole body* meaning that the body was considered the seat of the passions/sinful impulses of human beings. The idea of 'keeping in check' links to the idea of the 'bit' in verse 3.

In short, James seems to be saying that if a believer can control his/her tongue, then he/she can control the whole person!

3:3-4

James develops his argument by the use of *two* supporting illustrations.

- a) *Horses and Bits* – a small bit in the mouth of a large horse gives the rider control not only of the horse's head, but also of the whole horse.

b) *Ships and Rudders* - huge ships influenced by strong winds and waves could nevertheless be controlled by a tiny rudder and the direction of the vessel could be completely changed.- i.e. the whole body of the horse/ship can be controlled by the small bit or rudder.

James realizes that control of the tongue is the key to control of the whole self. The use of the tongue leads often to action. A sinful idea emerges and becomes verbalised in the mind, leading to arguments and action eg. adultery or murder. Thus speech is difficult to control *and* is a means of producing powerful action, whether negatively or positively, whether it be road rage or family quarrels.

3:5

Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts.

The fire simply escalates in its destructive effects, as does unwise or hurtful speech. The consequences of such speech can go on for years in people's lives.

3:6

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

Fires destroy and dictators like Hitler employed their tongues to this destructive effect. James here shows similarities to John in thought and speaks negatively of the world as the cultures/organisations that function without God and are therefore opposed to God's Kingdom. The tongue is a world of evil, so there is not only a world outside ourselves, but a world of evil *within* us. James seems to be thinking here of Jesus' thoughts in Mk. 7:14-23 ie. internal sinfulness, through which the tongue impacts the whole. Such flames are set up and fuelled by the demons, the authors of hate, jealousy, slander, prejudice, and envy. These are forces which divide, damage and destroy from hell.

3:7-8

James is not yet ready to terminate his argument. Instead he pursues the issue of the evil of human speech by use of another argument. By analogy with nature he argues that many living creatures have been domesticated ie. brought under human control. By huge contrast, *no man can tame the tongue* and this issue was well known in society. Many words are spoken in error or in the heat of the moment or with much subsequent regret. The tongue is *a restless evil* and produces unstable, uncontrollable speech, mirroring the unstable world of the demonic. By contrast, God is a God of peace, order and stability, as will be seen in 3:13-18.

James then completes his present description by referring to the tongue as *full of deadly poison* – see Psalm 140:3. Words are like poison. The saying ‘Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can never hurt me’ is rendered utterly false. Words do have a deadly effect.

3:9

With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.

James argues further that the tongue is uncontrollable. James shows the stupidity of this cursing because it is directed to *men who have been made in God's likeness*. That likeness must not be defaced (Gen 1:26; 9:6). James is talking here about vindictive curses uttered by mouth and arising out of the essentially evil human heart. James is deeply concerned about this, yet he sympathises by using the pronoun ‘we’. James is about to show his readers a better way in 3:13-18.

3:10

Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.

It is possible of course to bless good and God, but to curse sin and evil. The problem here however is that the object of the cursing is essentially the same, namely God and a person made in the image of God! The essence of the problem is that it is once again double-mindedness – and thus sinfulness.

3:11-12

Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring?

James yet again works from nature analogies to complete his argument. The spring is in a real sense ‘single-minded’ – it cannot produce two opposites from the same source!

My brothers, can a fig-tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs?

No single tree can bear two species of fruit! It may be that James is thinking about Mt. 7:16-20 and 12:33-35, with the underlying thought that the bad fruit (cursing) reflects the underlying, corrupt nature of the person.

Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.

This is where a salt spring tries to produce pure water but fails! Our language betrays our bitterness trying to be sweet! That disposition betrays the absence of God’s Spirit/God’s wisdom. This insight into corrupt nature prepares the way for the treatment of church problems in 4:1-12.

Sermon Outline 5 3:1-12

Beware! Danger & Damage from uncontrolled use of the Tongue

One commentator wrote this – “How perilous it is to be someone whose daily business is actually to speak about the Word of God is obvious when we remember how prone to err we all are, and especially to err in our speaking”. The tragedy is that sometimes the real blockage to our gospel communication is not the issues that are hard for postmodern people to grasp, but rather our own lack of integrity in, by and through our own inter-personal speech!

Scot McKnight believes that James 3:1-4:12 is mainly, if not solely, directed towards teachers. Thus 3:13 links back to 3:1-2. ‘Boastful’ and ‘disorder’ link to similar terms in 3:5 and 3:8. He believes that arguments about envy, ambition, and boasting suggest that 3:13-18 show that *all* of 3:1-12 was directed towards *the teachers* in the messianic community. Not all scholars agree though. One thing for sure is that James is not organized like a Pauline or Petrine letter, which are more logical and linear than James! More *topical* in organization is the Letter of James. So we cannot be completely sure that *all* of 3:1-4:12 is addressed to *teachers* but it seems very likely to McKnight.

1-2

Warning of a negative nature appears in 3:1a, followed by a reason in 3:1b, plus a second warning in 3:2b. 3:1-12 shows a *mix* of direct and indirect commands about the use of the tongue. His main concern may not be the total number of teachers, but with the horror of a good number of teachers using *inappropriate* communication. Some teachers sought verbal domination cf Matt 23:6-8. Teaching does lead to power, knowledge, wisdom and influence. Teachers use *many* words and therefore are vulnerable to the temptation of being irresponsible in speech. See Prov 12:18; 13:3; 18:21; Mark 7:20-23; Matt 5:21-22. These are warnings to teachers and preachers. They must speak lovingly. Control of the tongue leads to control of the whole person, and indeed control of the entire messianic community as ‘body’.

3-6

The Problem is that the tongue’s size is small but its impact is huge!. Homer once said that words have wings! James took very ordinary examples in life and bound them together. Graphic images are powerful to get a message across! A tiny ‘bit’ can control a huge animal. The teacher’s tongue ie character and speech, guides the church/community and this can be very destructive. The rudder is so relatively small yet has huge impact. The contrast is between small and large. Human desire must be controlled if the tongue is to have positive impact on the whole body of the church, but here in v. 5 is a

strong warning against arrogant boasting by some teachers that leads to discord and disunity. To summarize these three analogies very briefly, we can say –

Bit and horse = small size + great impact

Rudder and ship = small v. great + direction and guidance

Spark and forest = small v. great + damage and destruction

The destructive effect of loose words can be seen in Prov. 16:27; 26:21; Isa 30:27. When the tongue is abused, it becomes a ‘world of iniquity’. James uses ‘world’ to mean opposition to God and to God’s kingdom in this world. The tongue is a fire – ie. a world of injustice that is opposed to God’s purposes and plans. James is saying that the tongue gives rise to *injustice* in the community. A small word used harshly can stain the whole community. These teachers can disrupt and deflect the course of God’s design for nature ie. redemption. Hell itself stokes and provokes the abusive tongue. Hell is active and herein James warns teachers that they will be accountable to God for their use of the tongue. Such damage can be very hard and very slow to heal, once it’s delivered!

7-8

The Difficulty lies in the Taming of the Tongue! Humans can control animals but not their own tongues! James’s negative words are intended to challenge the teachers. See Prov. 12:18; 13:3; 15:4; 31:26. ‘Full of deadly poison’, ‘a restless evil’ – these are intended to be viewed communally. The root of an abusive tongue is hell (Jas 3:6) and the serpent (3:8) and in 3:15 James roots sinful behavior in its ‘earthly, unspiritual, devilish’ origins. Control of the tongue shows holiness and love. James pushes the teachers towards perfection.

9-12 *The Challenge* revolves around Tragedy and the Tongue. James points out the crazy but true situation by which the tongue can be used to bless *and* to curse. Yet humans are made in God’s image. How bizarre therefore that this contradiction happens! James uses metaphors to show how this should not be the case!

James returns to his direct style of 3:1 by his shock statement in 3:9 that the tongue is capable both of blessing *and* cursing. How can we bless God with our praises *and* curse humans made in God’s image? Early Christians referred to God as ‘Father’. All humans need to be treated with dignity and respect but it seems some in the community were not being treated in this way! 4 metaphors – a spring, a fig tree, a grapevine, salt water, all produce something that is not appropriate! Do not be as God – blesser *and* human – curser. Teachers should seek neither controlling or cursing, but seek wisdom and so his argument continues into 3:13-18.

6. James 3:13-18

Exegetical Notes

3:13-18 Two Types of Wisdom

3:13

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. James knows that the teachers of 3:1 would have claimed ‘understanding’ by the very ministry they carried out. Whether they showed wisdom, however, was a different matter. They were being called by James to show that wisdom by the lives they led! Cf. Mt. 7:15-23.

The Greeks considered humility to be a vice of weakness, but the NT repeatedly focuses on Christian lifestyle as imperative eg. Gal. 5. It is in good deeds that the true heart of a believer is measured in terms of its kingdom orientation. The truly wise act in humility cf. the hypocrites of Mt. 6:1-5. They avoid divisive speech and behaviour, and avoid self-promotion.

3:14

But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Envy or rivalry is basically a form of rigidity rooted in personal pride. It is very easy for rivalry to be mixed into this and splits often are rooted in personal ambition and pride. Satan is never far away in his desire to divide! If these forces are at work, then don’t deny it and don’t be proud of it. Such people may claim that the Spirit of God is leading them, but God does not promote division. By continued arrogance and stubbornness, such people begin to deceive themselves! The focus in this modified ‘vice and virtue list’ of 3:13-18 is on the state of the human heart as the root indicator of the corrupt, sinful nature. The issue is internal rather than external.

3:15

Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

Wisdom is a *good* gift from God – 1:5,17. See also Gen . 41:38-39; Exod. 31:3-4 in which wisdom and spirit are linked together. For James, wisdom is equated with the Holy Spirit. Thus James is arguing that evil behaviour is *not* inspired by the Spirit of God. Rather it is inspired in three particular ways –

- a) *earthly* At best, such people are inspired by their own natural selves rather than by God.

- b) *unspiritual* Such wisdom is not by the Spirit and such people know nothing of the renewing work of the Spirit – see Jude 19 and 1 Cor 2:14. Such a person is controlled by the ways of this world – power, ambition, authority, rather than humility and love.
- c) *The devil* The rivalry is actually inspired not by God but by Satan, the enemy of God. James in 3:14 and 4:7 makes mention of the devil and the link between testing and the devil suggests that James was sure such people were being led and inspired by the devil.

3:16

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. Unity and love are the foundations of the believing community, but when rivalry and party spirit enter, then the community begins to crack and the way is open for evil to enter and divide further. Arrogance and independence of members then thwarts efforts to impose discipline. If members go beyond reproof, then groups develop around such people and the splits deepen even further. This surely raises questions of what happens when members of a Christian community might have genuine grievances with other members or with leadership. It might be the very leadership of a church which is at fault and perhaps living outside of the will of God, embracing worldliness. The main mark of demonic activity is *division*, showing the essential instability of the demonic world – in contrast with the divine order and peace which should characterise the Church.

3:17

By contrast the wisdom that comes from above has other features, which are comparable with Paul’s categories for love and the Spirit. Whilst the issue of sincerity is dealt with widely in Scripture, the terms for ‘submissive’ and ‘impartial’ seem to be unique to James.

3:18

Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

This idea of a harvest of righteousness was well known in Scripture – Isa. 32:16-18; Amos 6:12. When peacemakers act, good deeds are the result. Harsh striving for the truth does not lead to righteousness. James is shown as a peacemaker in Acts 15 and 21, but the root of his teaching is surely found in Jesus’ own teaching and example. – Mt 5:9. True peace comes when people are handled justly.

Sermon Outline 6 3:13-18

Two Types of Wisdom – Earthly and Heavenly.

At this halfway point in the Letter of James, let's review some of the demands James has made on his believing communities –

- the demonstration of joy even in trials and suffering
- resisting the temptation to sin
- avoiding anger
- removing moral filth
- keeping oneself pure and unpolluted by the world
- loving neighbour as ourselves
- showing no favouritism
- meeting the physical needs of people, thus showing forth faith
- control of tongue – the small spark that causes dangerous fires

Depressing list? That's only a part of it. Depressing in the sense that we know our weakness and our own inability to meet those standards.

There is good news and James spells it out in 3:13-18. James challenges the believers, if they have wisdom and understanding, to prove it by the good life and good deeds he's already outlined. In order to do these deeds, we need an inner attitude that is governed and controlled by wisdom. The outworking of the life of faith depends on our possession of wisdom. Let's investigate this further. Three clues about wisdom –

1. James 1:5. When James challenges the churches to persevere in testings, so as to attain mature faith, he says that if the believers lack wisdom, they should ask God and God will grant it - practical and spiritual insight.
2. James then repeats in 3:17 that the wisdom he's writing about does come from heaven – it is divine. 3:17f. suggests wisdom is an attitude that brings practical consequences. A number of scholars are convinced that, based on his knowledge of OT and Gospels, James used the term 'wisdom' as equivalent to Paul's use of 'Holy Spirit'.
3. There's yet a further level, for which we turn to Paul. What is this wisdom that comes from God? No less than Christ Himself. *He* is our wisdom. 1 Cor 1:30 deserves our reading. If we are to live a good life, demonstrating good deeds, then we must do it not merely by imitation of Christ but by the indwelling of the Spirit of Christ. To imitate without being indwelt is like driving a car with no battery. We can live this life

only if indwelt by Christ and His Spirit. There's more to it – v. 13 tells us that the controlling attitude in this lifestyle is that of *humility*. This life is to be lived 'in the humility of wisdom' – the humility that belongs to wisdom. That is the attitude that is to control all our thought and action.

What actually *is* humility? 3 definitions can be suggested –

- i) Humility means recognition that we are rubbish? No – that's not an option – every believer is one who is precious in God's sight, and for whom Christ died through great pain and the shedding of His blood.
- ii) Pretending to be unimportant? No – that can be inverted pride and a form of the pretence that God rejects in v. 14.
- iii) Recognition that all we do, all we have and all we are, come to us purely by God's grace and not because we deserve it or have achieved it by ourselves. That attitude should undergird all we do in life and ministry.

This is the attitude that James demands in 3:13 and he develops this theme through Chapter 4. It is our Christian *character* that reveals itself in conduct and works. James says the *starting-point* for our conduct and works is the humility and lowliness of divine wisdom. We can achieve this only if we are indwelt by Christ and His Spirit and if we allow Christ to live out His resurrection life within us. Why is humility so central to James?

- a) *What happens when humility is absent?* Vv. 14-16. James describes what happens when people demonstrate 'wisdom' that is not rooted in humility. In fact he describes the opposite of humility which involves arrogance, self-importance and self-assertion. This 'wisdom' is portrayed in a highly negative way by James – v. 15b – it's earthly, unspiritual, even devilish. When this 'wisdom' dominates the life of a fellowship – and remember James is here addressing the Church – then it is a recipe for disaster. James recognizes a number of ingredients in that recipe for disaster in the life of a church –

1. *Bitter jealousy.* Resentment over the possessions, the gifts and the influence that other people possess. When the spirit of jealousy, envy and resentment is present, then we can be sure that another spirit will follow – unforgiveness. Sometimes we do not even know a person or we don't really properly understand a person but already there are feelings of resentment springing up. If that person then does something wrong or offends us, we have already constructed a barrier that will

make forgiveness very difficult. Resentment damages and destroys relationships – not always open and visible – like an undercurrent – a ‘cancer’ that invisibly destroys the body.

2. *Selfish ambition.* Ties to jealousy. We want gifts or possessions or influence for our own selfish use, without concern for others or for the Church eg Rev Jim Jones – Pentecostal Minister of the Peoples Temple in the USA – sought power, money, sex, and convinced his congregation of 900 to go to South America and go straight to heaven by drinking cyanide poison. He controlled his church members totally and frighteningly and the result was that all 900 committed suicide in 1978.
3. *Boasting and pretence.* James commands ‘Do not boast and be false to the truth’. Pretence is a false thing and the Scriptures have much to say about it. What is James’ intention here? 3 theories – a) Pretence contradicts the truth as it is in Christ. b) Pretence evades the truth that demands new life. c) Pretence *conceals* the reality of what people are like. James is most likely saying – if you have jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, don’t deny it. Deal with it. Root it out – readiness to forgive and readiness to say ‘sorry’ are the hardest things to do in any language.
4. *Disorder.* When these evils exist in a church, relationships will be paralyzed. We will not know who to trust, there will be no honesty/openness. In fact there will be precisely what James says – disorder=instability and inconsistency – same Greek word as the *restless* evil called the ‘tongue’.
5. *Every vile practice.* Once our attitudes and relationships are messed up, it’s only a matter of time before these weaknesses in character reveal themselves in wrong deeds.

All these are the ingredients that will infect the Body of Christ with *potentially fatal disease*.

- b) *What happens when humility is present?* Vv. 17-18. When the wisdom from above indwells us, when Christ energizes our lives by His Spirit, He produces that which is of first priority to Him, namely purity/holiness. Then comes the outpouring of fruit into a fellowship and relationships. This fruit is remarkably similar to that in Galatians Chapter 5.
 - A Spirit of peace-loving and peace-making that positively seeks to build relationships in the Body of Christ. Do we go out of our way to know each other, take interest in and encourage others?

- *Gentleness* –willingness not to claim our own rights, willingness to set aside rights and consideration of, and sensitivity towards the needs of others.
- *Open to reason* – approachable in such a way that people feel they can bring their emotions and problems to us.
- *Full of mercy* – exercising practical care of those in need, thus yielding good fruits and a harvest of righteousness in the harmonious fellowship of the church.

Notice an interesting development when these fruits appear in a church out of a spirit of humility – instead of the ‘inconsistency’ that James mentions in 3:10,16 there is now *consistency* and stability. Instead of the ‘pretence’ referred to by James in v. 14, now there is *sincerity*. We can trust each other and rely on each other to *do* what we and they promise to do. These are the ingredients of a growing and maturing fellowship where relationships are on a stable, sincere and consistent basis – pretence and inconsistency are absent. This is part of James’s calling to believers to achieve *wholeness* and *completion*.

Possible additional concluding material – the Human Battle

There is a *battle* going on in every life and fellowship. These two wisdoms are battling for possession and control. Possession of the New Birth does not lead automatically to the obedience of faith. It is a battle to live the sanctified life for which James pleads. The voice of the old nature is still strong and pulls against our new life in the Spirit.

How are we to engage in this battle?

Answer: With God’s weapons that James has revealed.

- a) The need to battle in prayer 1:5
- b) The need to resist temptation 1:13-18
- c) The need to build Christ and His Word into our lives – we were brought into relationship with Him through His Word (1:18), but this Word must grow within us (1:21).
- d) The need to live a life controlled by the Spirit of Christ who is the wisdom of God (3:13-18).

Why are we to engage in this battle? Why bother?

We are called to receive in humility the implanted Word 1:21. We are called to show works in the humility of wisdom 3:13.

But why?

What is our motivation? Precisely this, our motivation *is* the humility of wisdom, the Word, the Christ, the Spirit. Our own challenge is to the humility of Christ through His humiliation. Paul in Philippians 2:1-11 tells us that Christ ‘emptied Himself’ –

- a) He had eternal glory in heaven but laid it aside.
- b) He entered this world by incarnation and began borrowing – a room to be born in, houses to sleep in, a boat to preach from, a donkey to ride on, a tomb to be buried in. He possessed nothing of His own.
- c) He took the form of a servant. The Lord of Glory washed dirty feet.
- d) He became like a human being – had a job, hungry, thirsty, tired, angry, cried, rejoiced, suffered.
- e) He humbled Himself to death out of obedience to His Father.
- f) He endured the humiliation of the Cross – ‘dying a thousand deaths’.

Cicero (1 BC Roman orator) – “Let the very name of the Cross be far removed not only from the body of a Roman citizen, but even from his thoughts, his eyes his ears”. So appalling was the Cross that it was not even to be mentioned. To Jews, anyone crucified was considered to be under the curse of God.

Even our greatest moments of humility cannot begin to be compared to the depths of humbling entered voluntarily by Christ. *Why* did He descend so low and accept total humiliation? Because it was the only way he could gain emption for His people – the only way He could call out for Himself into eternal glory, the community of Gods people. Paul asked the Philippians in light of this – is it too much to ask that you humble yourselves? Paul wanted to see believers humble themselves in their relationships. James has in mind the same thought – if Christ humbled Himself to this extent, is it too much to ask that we demonstrate, within the church and to the world, a good life and good deeds that are rooted in the humility of Christ and in the power of His Spirit?

7. James 4:1-12

Exegetical Notes

James moves into the sphere of intra-church conflict.

4:1

What causes fights and quarrels among you? These were happening *within* the church.

Don't they come from your desires? The root and source of the conflict lay in their own sinful impulses ie. the flesh or fallen nature. There is essentially an *internal* problem – *that battle within you*. These tendencies are inside a person but they ought to be controllable by the Spirit's help. The problem is that such people are *divided*, so there is a constant struggle between God and this world for control of the person see James 4:4,8. The battle seems to be between that evil impulse and wisdom ie. Spirit.

4:2

Davids prefers the translation –

You want things that you are not able to have;

You 'murder' and are jealous, but you cannot get your desires;

You quarrel and fight and you do not have what you want because you do not ask God for it:

You ask, and you do not receive it because your motives are bad.

James is developing 1:4 and the key problem of 'desire', as the root of sin and conflict. Rather than rethink the desire itself, the person resents those who do have what they want. The person then jealously attacks ('murders') the person resented – see 3:14. After all the struggle for power/prestige/possessions, the person still ends up without getting what they want! Scheming ends in frustration! They have tried to satisfy their desires in the wrong way (cf Jesus' temptations in Luke 4) rather than by asking and receiving from God. Dissatisfaction with God, and with divine provision for our needs, is ultimately demonic.

4:3

When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. Prayer does not have an automatic, guaranteed answer. Even the Lord's Prayer opens with three requests which focus on the will of God. Answers do not come as if by magic, through manipulating/bending God or asserting our own wills/desires onto God. Prayer emerges from a *trust* in the Sovereign and Loving purposes of God.

Davids, p.100 'This is not the trusting child asking for a meal but the greedy child asking for the best piece or the spoiled child demanding his or her way. They are asking God to bless their schemes; God will have no part of it'.

Their prayer is not a response to God by His Spirit but rather a fleshly effort to manipulate God. Note that much of animism/pagan religion seeks to obtain blessing from a god by manipulation/offerings. It is a desire for pleasure cf. 1:14. Prayer paradoxically sometimes seems unconditional (Matt. 7:7-11); sometimes demands waiting (Lk. 11:5-13) and sometimes carries conditions (Mt. 17:20). Often, we need more careful exegesis of the text in context eg. Matthew 18:19-20.

4:4

'You adulterous people'. Here we see a link to the OT people of God. Israel mixed her worship of God between the true God and the Baal.

The key issue is that 'friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God'. James prefaces this with 'Don't you know?', indicating this was not new teaching.

The world means that human culture, structures and procedures are organised without reference to God.

Davids p.100 'These Christians worship Christ quite faithfully, but they also seek influence, financial security, and a better standard of living, which means they cannot live the church's ideal of servant-hood and generosity 'too literally''. The quarrels show that power, hierarchy and authority have been brought from the world into the church. Just as a husband desires total allegiance from his wife, so also God demands exclusive faithfulness.

4:5

Or do you think Scripture says without reason that God jealously longs for the spirit that He made to live in us. James here portrays God as a jealous husband (Ex. 20:5; 34:14; Deut. 4:24) who refuses to accept the adultery of his bride. If people love the world, they thereby corrupt and damage their spirits. Scripture makes this plain and is not merely the words of human beings. God is serious about what He wrote and will not be mocked in his people's adultery with the world.

We do not know where this text comes from, but it may be a lost apocryphal work. The NIV chooses the version *the Spirit that God placed in us is filled with fierce [or 'turns towards envious'] desires*. Davids feels the most accurate translation is 'God jealously longs for the spirit that He made to live in us'.

4:6

But He gives more grace. That is why Scripture says ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. (Prov. 3:34) James is firm about the anger and judgement of God, yet he affirms the great forgiving heart of God – 5:1-6; 19-20. There must be that desire to repent and turn to God for grace. This text is also used by 1 Peter 5:5 to argue for mutual submission and humility in the context of resisting the devil.

4:7

Submit yourselves , then, to God.

Submission is a major biblical theme. This is not cheap grace. It is not forgiveness of the sins that a person intends to continue in ! Grace is *available* if the person submits. There is a clear condition set here. With this text starts a series of commands to the believers. The first step is *Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you.* The impulse to sin may come from the fallen flesh, but submission to that temptation means yielding to the devil – see Mt 4:1-11; Mk. 8:28-34; Lk 22:31; Jn. 13:2,27. The devil can only seduce the minds of those who have made themselves available to the devil. Learning to say ‘No’ will compel the devil to flee. This idea of resisting comes in 1 Peter 5:8-9 and Eph. 6:13.

4:8

Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Not all worship is acceptable to God. Worldliness and disunity makes worship unacceptable. The act of coming near is an OT phenomenon eg. Moses at the burning bush; approaching the temple after purification eg. 2 Chron 26:16-20 King Uzziah. This is seen metaphorically in Heb. 4:16; 7:19 – boldness in approaching God.

Wash your hands you sinners . Ritual hand-washing in the OT prior to worship eg. Ex. 30:19-21. Believers who are in sin need to be made aware of this and do something about it. Even in the OT, the cultic became a symbol for moral purity eg. Isa. 1:16-17. Hands and hearts are a combined symbol.

Purify your hearts, you double-minded. James moves from the outward to the inward. The root of the defilement is inward. Here the term *Double* means ‘not a person consciously hiding his or her real motives but one who has divided motives’. (Davids p.103) These are people who wish to follow Christ *and yet* they are not willing to give up the world – Rom. 6:8; 2 Cor. 5:11-17.

4:9

Grieve, mourn and wail. Genuine repentance will yield inner sadness over what we have done. This will show outwardly in mourning and wailing. People

must *feel* the seriousness of sin *before* they are promised the peace of God. Evangelism sometimes reverses this!

Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. Deep sorrow for sin now is essential to future joy.

4:10

Humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up.

True repentance brings forgiveness and restoration. James concludes this long section on the *tongue, wisdom* and *evil impulse*, by returning to the theme of repentance and its true nature. James may well be basing his ideas on the words of Jesus eg's. Mt. 23:12; Lk. 14:11; 18:14.

4:11

A pastoral note introduced by the term *brothers* but nevertheless continuing with commands. *Do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.* Community harmony is damaged if we spread gossip about believers to those outside the Christian community. The sins of Christians should not be publicly broadcast, even if there is truth in the accusations. See also Rom. 1:30; 2 Cor. 12:20; 1 Peter 2:12; 3:16.

Based on Lev. 19:18, Mk. 12:31; Mt. 7:12, we are to love our neighbour. To criticize another is not loving and we ourselves certainly would not want to be treated in such a way. In effect, to criticize others is implicitly criticizing the law ie. sitting in judgment on the law. We need to be very careful to avoid suggesting that some cases allow us to ignore or modify the divine law! The NT reinforces the command not to judge - Mt. 7:1-5; Lk. 6:37-42; Rom. 2:1; 14:4; 1 Cor. 4:5; 5:12. This of course does not forbid the use of community discipline – Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-5 or the use of loving criticism in private by elders Gal. 6:1.

4:12

There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you – who are you to judge your neighbour?

James stresses his point. Jesus said that only God had authority to judge – Jn. 5:22-23,30. Our judgment must not usurp God's function. We need GRACE to deal with our own weaknesses.

God's authority is noted in Ps. 9:20-21; Heb. 7:11; Gen 18:25; Mt. 10:28.

Sermon Outline 7 4:1-12

Friendship with the World Or Submission to God? The World, the Flesh and the Devil.

Locate the sermon around the triangle of Prayer, Humility and the Will of God in submission.

James is very direct here and uses 2nd Person, instead of 3rd Person! Since 3:1, he has been hugely concerned about teachers, their tongues and the damage they are doing! 1:19-21; 2:1-12; 3:1-18 hint at conflict in the community but this now becomes more definite in 4:1-12.

4:1-3 The Root of Division –

James asks where their conflicts and disputes actually come from? He answers that they are rooted in their own *desires*. The conflict could be verbal or physical or both. The setting was close to a Zealot-infested society, so it's quite possible that physical violence was involved. The teachers are longing for power, control, prejudice/bias. This could be expressed in internal, individual conflict of the fallen 'self' (Gal 5:17) and/or church, communal conflict within the messianic community.

James elaborates in verse 2 – 'You desire and do not have, so you commit murder'. 'You covet and cannot obtain, so you engage in disputes'. The desire was to get rid of their rivals. The next line is about lustful watching leading to sexual sins, so it does seem likely that verse 2a is referring to *actual* murder. Craving desires lead to murder and disputes/conflicts in the community. Verse 2c seems to mean that they could have asked God for something – perhaps wisdom (1:5-6) – but failed to ask for wisdom because they wanted what *they* wanted and not what God wanted. They didn't want humility (4:7-10). Some teachers are asking God for self-orientated things and wrong things.

Unanswered prayer is caused by doubt (1:6-8 cf 5:14-15); not asking (4:2); asking for the wrong reasons (4:3). The teachers wanted the things of *this* world. They wanted self-glory and power. There is a fine line between wanting what God wants and wanting what *they* want!

4:4-6 Accusations against the 'dividers'.

James seems to define 'adultery' here as being a friend of God *and* a friend of the world. Strong, but legitimate, use of the tongue by James himself!! See 1 John 2:15-17. Humans are responsible for choosing their friendship – world or God. You can't have both. 'Enmity (hostility) with God' relates to 'friendship

with the world'. The teachers are thus located *with* the Evil One and *with* the enemies of God's people. James *probably* didn't want the believers to 'lord it over' other people (Mk 10:35-45) – it is the teachers' temptation and it causes chaos in the community. Such a choice by teachers has chaotic consequences in the community. Verse 5 shows that our relationship with God is intimate and our choice of Him *or* the world shows our faithfulness *or* our adultery ie. unfaithfulness.

James is referring to Prov 3:34 "Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that Scripture says....'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble'?" The teachers' unfaithfulness is splitting the community but God yearns for the spirit He has put in His people. God's jealous love is at work to protect the spirit He has put in us. *But* there are *hints* of the Holy Spirit in 1:18; 1:21; 4:5. Tricky text here because it could be a reference to the human spirit that is capable of envy! ie. the teachers were letting the spirit of envy rule their hearts and actions! Verse 6 reveals that this envious human spirit can be overruled by God's grace! This is God's alternative to human divisiveness. 4:6 is surely the contrast to 4:5 ie 5b Humans long to envy; 6a God gives grace; 6b1 God resists the proud; 6b2 God gives grace to the humble. The battle is between human natural desire for envy and the divine desire for humans to do the divine will. God's grace can forgive repentant teachers and restore them to become what God desires. Humility before God is needed before we can receive grace. As a pastor, James longs to see the teachers align with the poor.

4:7-10 *Commands for the 'dividers'.*

Because God gives grace to the humble v.6

- a) *Submission* v.7a means submit to God for the gift of forgiveness for those who repent cf. 1 Peter 5:5-9.
- b) *Resistance* v.7b to the devil – military jargon about the cosmological language between Satan and the demons *versus* God and His people, taking place in this world cf. Ephesians 6:13 and 1 Peter 5:9. James is suggesting a *defensive* response to an opponent who attacks. Satan is instrumental in tempting people, but human responsibility is also key in James's thought. Prayerful obedience is crucial in this whole area of spiritual warfare.
- c) *Draw near to God* v.8a This requires humility, submission and resistance to the devil and vulnerability to God's Will. Repentance leads to holiness, hearing, doing ie. faith *and* works. God then draws near to the repentant.

- d) *Purity and cleansing* v.8b ie the outer and inner being. Notice the strong language – ‘you sinners’.
- e) *Repentance* v.9 ‘Lament, mourn, weep’. James expects his readers to *embody* their repentance rather than giving a mental/spiritual Platonic response! James wants the teachers’ laughter and joy to be turned around.
- f) *Humility and its Promise* v.10 James wants the teachers to join the people who are needy and dependent on God cf. Matt 23:12. In their selfish ambitions, the teachers have actually offended the Lord. God will exalt repentant teachers by enabling them to live godly , humble, loving and peace-making lives.

4:11-12 *Teachers, tongues and the Community.*

Note here, as elsewhere, the similarity to Jesus’ teaching. James now shifts to a more pastoral approach to tie together 3:1-4:12. The chief focus has been on sins of speech that have damaged the community. Evil speaking against people involves an act of judgment against them. How dare we judge if we are not God! If we judge the Law, we are failing to *do* the Law and we are putting ourselves in the place of God. God *alone* is Lawgiver and Judge. The teachers were acting out of pride and idolatry. James warns them of final Judgment.

8. James 4:13 - 5:6

Exegetical Notes

4:13

Thus far, James tackles *Community Disunity*, rooted in complaint, criticism and worldliness. (3:1-4:12). He now moves on to deal with *wealth*, with its associated temptations to apathy in the areas of prayer and dependence.

Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money’.

James uses the term ‘rich’ to describe unbelievers (2:6 and 5:1). Here in 4:13 he addresses Christian believers who were probably at least middle class merchants. Their business seems genuine enough- probably trading by ship or caravan with goods like grain, wine, oil and spices. The traders brought foreign goods back to Palestine and sold them at a profit, hoping to accumulate enough money to buy a large estate and elevate their social status. In this text, the traders will spend a year buying and selling. The text gives no indication of *huge* profits and after all, trading trips need to be planned out in advance. The

issue for James is that all these goals and plans for business are being launched in the same way that the world does its business.

4:14

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. They have not consulted God in the midst of their fragile and uncertain lives. What if death or disease suddenly strikes? Likewise the rich fool who felt secure and worked towards a comfortable retirement. See Lk. 12:16-21. The Christian traders addressed by James have a false sense of security and of their control over life.

4:15

Instead, you ought to say, 'If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that'.

We need to seek and do the will of God – Acts 18:21; Rom. 1:10; Phil. 2:19,24. God alone controls our lives and actions, but we can still plan – indeed we should! *We* need to plan *with God*, bearing in mind *His goals* and *listening for His ideas*.

At the same time our only lasting security is in the Lord Himself. Perhaps the key issue is genuinely to seek the Lord's Will in *every situation* of life. At what point does concern for security become materialism or even idolatry?

4:16

As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

People try to impress one another and in the process delude even themselves. Name-dropping, allusions to places and people of power, gloating over achievements. It is all empty boasting for only God has ultimate power and control. Indeed such boasting steals glory from God.

Davids p.113 'Any plan confidently made outside God's will discerned through prayer and meditation is not just foolish – it is sin'. It is always a negative vice – an evil self-sufficiency – see Rom. 3:27; 4:2; Gal. 6:13-14. Sometimes it appears positively re. boasting in the Lord or in service - see Rom. 5:2-3; 1 Cor. 13:3b.

4:17

Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.

This has the sound of a possible saying of Jesus. It seems to be a statement that sins of omission really are sins, but it probably has specific reference to the sin of the merchants in failing to follow and obey God in the world of business – see Lk. 12:47-48. James may be rebuking the merchants for planning like the

world and hoarding wealth rather than following God's investment method, namely giving to the poor – Mt. 6:19-21. If the merchants took God seriously, they might need to take a drastic cut in their security and standard of living and focus on worship – see Prov. 30:7-9.

James now turns his attention to address wealthy non-Christians. He does this to pull Christians away from material seduction and to prepare them for suffering imposed by the rich and powerful.

5:1

Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you.

In contrast to 4:14, the 'rich' here are outside the people of God. James cites them also in 1:9 and 2:6. At the moment, the 'rich' have material security, status, power and comfort but at some point they will have to face the Day of the Lord.

'Weeping' is a common OT theme eg's. Lam. 1:1-2; Jer. 9:1; 13:17; Isa. 10:1; 14:31; Ezek. 21:12; Amos 8:3. James calls for mourning in light of the coming misery for the rich. See also Matt. 8:12; 13:42; 19:24.

5:2-3

Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.

James exercises a prophetic vision here to indicate their loss of security, hopes and dreams. Wealth was stored in two principal forms –

- a) Their piles of clothes could have been used by the poor, but were attacked by moths.
- b) Their gold and silver has been stored, but has tarnished and clearly was not needed by the rich. It could have been given to the poor.

The eaten clothes and tarnished metal are, as it were, paraded at the final judgment in condemnation of the rich. In a real sense the final judgment is already here in James's day. The church *already* lives in the new life of the coming age. This is the supreme irony, for the rich lived as if they would live forever. The eating of flesh like fire is linked with the final judgment in Judith 16:17. The 'last days' for James is both present and future eg. Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 2:28. For James, the judge is 'at the door' (5:8-9).

Davids p.116 'James sees as tragic figures well-dressed men and women pondering investments over excellent meals; they act as if they were winners, but in reality have lost the only game that matters'.

Note the strength of the language used by James, in contrast to the postmodern West.

5:4

Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

Amassed wealth normally suggested injustice esp. to agricultural workers. NB. Jesus refers to such workmen in Mt. 9:37; 10:10; Mk. 1:20; Luke 10:2; 15:17. These workers would be the younger sons of peasant families. Such workers needed to buy food every day. But wages were often withheld in various ways:

- a) Postpone payment till after harvest to ensure the workers didn't disappear before then.
- b) Argue technical points to claim that the contract had not been fulfilled.
- c) Be too tired to pay the workers that night.

The rich used the best lawyers, making appeals very difficult/impossible. God was defender of the poor (Ps. 17:1-6; 18:6; 31:2), and therefore James implies here a threat of judgment on the oppressing landlords.

5:5

You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.

James hints at a double meaning – the biblical day of slaughter, when God slaughters His enemies – Isa. 30:33; 34:5-8. The irony is that THEY are now the fattened calf which God will slaughter. Such self-indulgent living is condemned in the OT – Ezek. 16:49; Amos 2:6-8; 8:4-6 – as well as in the NT – Lk. 16:19-31. ‘Fattening’ occurs in Isa. 6:10; Lk. 21:34. ‘Day of slaughter’ is found in Jer. 46:10; 50:26-27; Ezek. 39:17.

5:6

You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you. Courts could be used to have righteous and innocent, yet ‘inconvenient’, people exterminated. The same courts could be used to deprive the poor of any land/means of support they might have had. God does hear the groans of the poor, especially in heaven – see Rev. 6:9-11. See also Ps. 10:8-9; 37:14,32; Amos 2:6, 5:12; Mt. 5:39; Rom. 12:19; 1 Peter 2:23. James expects believers not to resist, but to suffer patiently. Heavenly, eschatological resistance may be uppermost in the mind of James.

Sermon Outline 8 4:13 - 5:6

God's Plans or Ours? The Foolishness of Worshipping Wealth.

4:13-17 *Beware of Presuming.*

Linked to 1:9-11 and 2:5-7 and to 'arrogance' in 4:1-6. James seems to jump from one theme to another. In 4:13-5:6 James speaks of presumption, life's brevity and an alternative to presumption. Also wealth and oppression.

These travelling business people may *not* be members of the messianic community, especially if 4:13-17 is linked to 5:1-6. In 4:13-5:6 James does not call his readers 'brothers and sisters'. On the other hand, James is a Christian and expects his readers of 4:13-17 to listen to him which *may* suggest that his readers actually *are* messianic. Besides, 4:15 mentions 'the Lord' which also suggests that the addressees are Christian.

Who therefore were these merchants? These traders –

- a) make their own decisions and control time.
- b) their location is under their control.
- c) the duration of the business trip is their choice.
- d) their effort and profit is in their own hands.
- e) their goal is *profit*.

James is *not* against plans or profits but he does critique arrogant independence cf. Matt 16:26; Phil 3:8.

James challenges his readers –

- a) *Life is short* 4:14 cf 1:9-11. In the midst of their pride and arrogance, the merchants don't know even tomorrow! We don't know what our life will be like tomorrow. Tricky Greek here. Prov 27:1 is helpful, as is Matt 6:34. Human life is like a mist or vapour.
- b) *Life actually is in God's Hands – Sovereignty and Providence* 4:15-16. God is Sovereign in all of life and even business ventures need God's guidance. There should be contingency in *all* plans. The Lord's Prayer – Matt 6:10 is key, as is 1 Cor 4:19 and Rom 1:10. The crux for James was dependence on the Lord's Will. Pride and arrogance is the choice of the merchants, who believe that *they* are in control. Those merchants, claims McKnight, were *not* messianists. They needed to be proud of being related to the Lord Himself. The merchants' boasting was verbal (3:5) and behavioural (4:13). The sin is presumptuous planning and proud confidence in themselves.

c) *Life is sinful if we know what is right and fail to do it.* 4:17. 4:16-17 is not specifically messianic or Christian. Some ‘hear’ only but fail to *do*. Here James is specifically thinking of the merchant and his/her sin of arrogant presumption. The opposite is trust in God and a spirit of humility before God. James is referring to a merchant who knows God’s providence and his/her own limitations and his/her need to trust God, yet fails to live on that basis. Sin is deliberate disregard of God in the world of business.

5:1-6 Beware of Oppression

‘Come now’ is the same as the opening of 4:13 linking together 4:13-17 with 5:1-6. The link involves ‘wealth’. The reading audience is probably the same in both passages ie ‘the wealthy’. Neither passage is addressed to the messianic community. James here plays the role of a prophet of old. He employs a tone of continuous warning and accusing re God’s awareness of the wealthy folks’ oppression of the poor and His threat of Judgment –

a) *5:1 The Warning.* Nothing in this passage suggests that the ‘rich people’ are messianists. These rich people are addressed as the ones who oppressed the messianic community. The oppressors will only change when they receive God’s grace. These rich farmers will be judged by God. Weeping in the NT appears when judgment is coming or in the context of repentance or disaster. Typical of the weeping of prophets promising the coming Day of the Lord. ‘Coming’ and ‘coming upon’ is a present tense verb.

b) *5:2-3 The Wealthy’s Lifestyle.* James focuses on the impermanence of riches. Rusted ‘treasure’ will testify against the rich on the Day of the Lord. The riches *have* rotted and have not been used to help the poor but have left an ongoing state of affairs. Moth-eaten clothes cf Matt 6:19. Rotting metal points to idols of metal. Ezek 24:6,11,12. False metals are like false claims of the rich – James 5:3; Matt 6:19-34. Their riches will finally betray the rich in the Judgment cf Mk 1:44; 6:11. Metaphorical language that unspiritual/unredeemed bodies will face destruction. The fire of judgment will be completely destructive. Much of Jesus’ own thinking is tied into James’s words eg. Matt 6:19-20. The rich are storing false treasure! Such riches will accuse them in the Judgment. Strong focus in 5:3 on future imminent judgment that actually will undo injustice and judge the unjust and establish justice.

c) *5:4 The oppressive acts of the rich are known to God.* cf Exod. 2:23b-25. God will hear the cries of the oppressed. Very specific accusations – ‘Wages of labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by

fraud, cry out (present) and the cries of the harvesters have reached (perfect) the ears of the Lord of hosts'. The cries are continuous and have not finished. 'Have reached' – action here is complete but has left an ongoing state of affairs ie. God *has* heard! Typical of poor, struggling first century Palestinian agricultural workers in the first century AD. – see Lev 19:13; Deut. 24:15; Matt 20:8; Jer. 22:13. James has spoken against violence (1:20) and murder (4:2) but in 5:7-11 he insists on *patience* in awaiting divine justice.

d) 5:5-6 *The Wealthy's Lifestyle.....again!* The rich have piled up wealth for the here and now, not for the age to come. This has involved unloving, sinful exploits . Judgment, and the Day of the Lord, are sometimes called 'slaughter' (Obad, 10; Zech 11:4,7; Isa 30:25; 34:2,6). This James' reference is probably a reference to *real* murder and *real* violence that was emerging in the Messianic Community. The 'righteous one' may be a reference to obedient believers in the church. It could be a reference to James himself or even to Christ Himself. It may well be righteous martyrs who actually *are* protesting against unjust oppression!

9. James 5:7-20

Exegetical Notes

5:7

Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains.

James calls believers to a *faithful endurance* in the midst of provocation. The believer is called to survive the world's attacks by the power of the Spirit – see refs to patience in Rom. 12:1-21; Heb. 6:12, 15; 10:32-39; 12:1-24. Our hope is in the Second Coming when all evil will be destroyed. Until then, we are called to be faithful witnesses of new life in Christ. This does not prevent us from trying to improve conditions here on earth in the meantime. Patience during suffering is extremely difficult. The farmer depended utterly on the autumn rains in Oct. – Nov. prior to sowing and on the later rains in March – April for the ripening of the harvest. Farmers to the south of such a zone would experience even greater unreliability of rainfall.

5:8

You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near.

As with the farmer, the believer needs to focus all hope in a condition that is *outside* his or her control. They are to wait patiently for the coming of the King. Doubt must be resisted, as the believer stands constant. The vision of the impending end of the race should give renewed vision, energy and encouragement. The focus is on preparedness and perseverance.

5:9

Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

James has spoken about patience as a response to testing. Now he addresses the issue of grumbling in the context of speech. This involves overt or covert criticism of a fellow member of the community. (4:11) A community under pressure can easily produce criticism, either as an expression of hostility/frustration or out of resentment that someone has an easier life than you do! The community solidarity can be eroded by criticism and James warns of judgment. People often criticise their own weaknesses in others. God tells us not to judge, so if we do judge, we are being disobedient. (Mt. 7:1-2)

Christ's near coming is both warning *and* encouragement

5:10-11

Brothers, as an example of patience in the face of suffering, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

James refers here to *all* those prophets who showed their true faith in God by word and deed. The prophets *endured*, egs. Amos commanded not to speak – Amos 7; Elijah chased by Jezebel – 1 Kings 19:1f.; Jeremiah put in jail by King Zedekiah – Jer. 38. Suffering is part of life and ministry, but faithfulness *in the midst of pain* is possible. *As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job's perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

Context is Matt. 5:11-12. Perseverance yields happiness and blessedness – see Matt. 10:22; 24:13; Lk. 21:19; 1 Cor. 9:24-27; Phil. 3:13-14; cf 2 Tim. 4:6-8. Though Job complained, he refused to give up his trust or to disobey God. We must not give up, having come thus far. In the midst of the pain, the Lord has his purposes further down the road – He actually *is* exercising His love and mercy. James quotes Ps. 103:8 or 111:4. God really *is* concerned for us in the trial. God showed His care for Job in Job 42.

5:12 closing section

Above all, my brothers, do not swear – not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your ‘Yes’ be yes, and your ‘no’, no, or you will be condemned.

Jesus was saying that an ‘outer’ ‘Yes’ should match the ‘inner-heart’ ‘Yes’. In other words, there must be *no hypocrisy at all*. Making oaths suggests that *some* speech guaranteed the keeping of promises, whereas other speech could not be trusted. The speech of a Christian should be totally trustworthy, not partially! God will judge *every word*..

5:13-17

Is anyone of you in trouble? He should pray. This would include persecution (James 5:10), suffering (James 5:11 as in Job) and criticism by a community member (James 3:1-12). The word ‘trouble’ here refers to inner turmoil when we experience misfortune. Our response ought to be *Prayer*

1. *Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise.* We must beware of taking happiness for granted. Praise God for it.

2. *Is anyone of you sick?* Unlike violence, persecution or criticism, illness seems to be outside our control or our deserving. This will confuse us.

Here however, James outlines a particular response – *He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.* Healing and pastoral ministry are linked, so James says we should call the elders - not necessarily Christians gifted in healing. The elders *pray* and ask God to do the healing. Then, they *anoint with oil in the name of the Lord*. The oil was not magical or blessed or medicinal.

This anointing was a sign of the spiritual power of prayer and the healer’s authority. The prayer invokes the *power* and authority of the name of Jesus. This use of the name was basic in baptism, healing and exorcism. It was a public recognition that power lay in God alone and that request was being made for a demonstration of that power.

5:15

And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

It is the prayer that is potent. The faith lies in the elders, *not in the sick person*. It is the elders’ responsibility to exercise faith. God remains Sovereign and cannot be compelled. The healing here is very much physical healing. Sin *may* be the cause of the illness, but not necessarily. A chance for confession is given and the healing will indicate that God has forgiven the person. ‘If’ shows that confession should not be insisted on!

The relationship of faith and prayer is mentioned in Mk. 2:5; 5:34; 10:52; Acts 14:9. The ‘centre of gravity’ of faith in most NT miracles lies in the person praying, usually Jesus. Rarely is the healed person said to have faith. A rejection of Christ would prevent healing but ‘the amount of faith in the patient is biblically unimportant’. (Davids p. 134). Biblically it is true that sin *can* cause illness, but it is also true that *not all illness is caused by sin* – see 2 Kings 19:15-19; 20:3; Job; Mk. 2:5; John 5:14; 9:2-3; 1 Cor. 11:30. Hence James says ‘*If* he has sinned...’ Complete healing includes forgiveness from sin.

5:16

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

There is evidence from pastors that when a sick person confesses sin, resentment, unforgiveness or a bad relationship, then physical healing often takes place. James here spreads out the need for confession of sin beyond just the elders context. Public and private confession is required as a basis for further effective prayer. The ‘righteous person’ is not perfect but has confessed sin and is living appropriately. It is God, because He is a good and powerful Father, who works the healing.

There are multiple examples of confession in the OT eg. Psalms. Confession leads to forgiveness for the forgiver and the sinner – Mt. 6:14-15, producing health (1 Cor. 11:30-32; 1 John 5:16-17. There is a very real relationship between confession, discipline, forgiveness and healing.

5:17-18 Prayer

Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops.

James strengthens his case re the power of prayer, by referring to 1 Kings 17:1 – 18:46. The effects of the prayer were both negative (no rain) and positive (rain came and crops resulted). In a real sense, healing came to the land in answer to Elijah’s prayer. The OT and Jewish portrayal of Elijah is one of a normal and weak human being, subject to doubt and depression. We as believers have the same access to the same supernatural God.

Elijah also prayed in 1 Kings 17:20-22 for the dead son of the widow of Zarephath.

5:19-20

My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

A letter-ending normally re-states the purpose of the letter. The idea of ‘wandering’ means a serious shift away from the true faith. See Mt. 7:13-14. For James there is to be no compromise between the ways of life and of death. James is concerned with truth as a way of life, centred on the Lordship of Christ as presented throughout his letter. If someone wanders, the whole community is to go after that person. The goal should be *restoration and forgiveness* through repentance. It involves a recognition of error, a rejection of it and a 180 degree turn. People are encouraged to help in this process eg Lev. 19:17; Jude 23; 1 John 5:16. Truth in Scripture is very much something not merely believed but lived out as well.

In the OT, ‘wander’ was often used for serious error eg. Jer 23:17. This carries the sense of a moral departure from the faith, often linked to demon influence, and is common in the NT – Mt. 18:2-3; 24:4-5; Mk. 12:24; 13:5-6; Rom. 1:27; Eph. 4:14; 2 Thess. 2:11; 2 Tim. 3:13; Titus 3:3; 1 Peter 2:25; 2 Peter 2:15-18; 1 John 2:26; 4:6; Rev. 2:20.

In verse **20**, we are shown that there is a very real distinction between the two ways – one of life and one of death. The idea of death as penalty for sin is usually the issue of eternal judgment – Deut. 30:19; Job 8:13. The soul is the totality of the person and the verse focuses on the magnitude of the grace of God. James does seem here to refer to spiritual and eternal death, rather than to physical death. (see Jude 22-23) The sins are covered over and forgotten. Are the forgiven sins those of the sinner or the rescuer? The Greek is not actually clear, but there is a strong focus in Scripture – Ezek. 3:18-21; 33:9; 1 Tim. 4:16 – which puts heavy responsibility onto the rescuer, not simply to watch people go to destruction. James *may* have been driven by this motive to protect his own soul from judgment, because in a real sense, his whole letter is an exercise in warning and rescuing! James ends his letter on the note of the glorious grace and forgiveness of God.

Sermon Outline 9. 5:7-20

Rather, persevere.. in sickness, prayer, healing and confession: community preservation and the ‘prayer of faith’

Here's a letter whose validity even Luther was reluctant to admit. He thought James was in conflict with the Apostle Paul and was denying justification by faith. It's an intensely practical letter and Luther was willing to accept that aspect of James's letter. This epistle aimed to uplift and encourage struggling and persecuted believers who were being downtrodden and oppressed by richer landowners who were lording it over the poor. That social discrimination had entered the church and James was fighting to maintain a godly and united community of believers. So here's a highly down-to-earth letter – use and abuse of the tongue, warnings to the rich, wisdom, temptation, good works.

But, notice at the same time, James's frequent references to the future, to the end-times, to the heavenly dimension, to what theologians call *eschatology*. Let's note some key references to the divine dimension of the Christian life –

1:12 Receiving the crown of life.

1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above.

1:18 Birth through the word of truth.

2:5 Inheriting the kingdom.

2:19 Even the demons believe.

3:6 The tongue is set on fire by hell.

3:15-17 The wisdom that comes from heaven.

4:7 Resist the devil and he will flee from you.

4:14 What is your life? You are a mist.

4:15 You ought to say ‘*If it is the Lord's will*, we will live and do this or that’.

5:1 Listen, you rich, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming on you.

5:5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence.

James is concerned with Christian living here and now but he is constantly mindful of the future towards which believers and unbelievers are moving. The earthly life is vitally important but the eschatological life is also vital. This twin emphasis needs to be held in view because it will help us as we struggle with some aspects of this passage – present earthly experience and future

eschatological experience. When we turn to James 5:7-20, surprise, surprise, we see this same recurring focus on the present *and* the future. It is also likely that in 5:7-11, James states just how he expects the messianic community to respond to the presumptuous boasting, pride, arrogance and oppression of the wealthy -

5:7 Be patient, brothers, till the Lord comes.

5:8 Stand firm because the Lord's coming is near.

5:9 The Judge is standing at the door.

5:11 You have seen what the Lord finally brought about.

5:12 Let your 'Yes' be yes and your 'No', no, or you will be condemned.

5:15 The Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven.

5:18 The heavens gave rain.

5:20 Turning a sinner from error will save him from death and cover a multitude of sins.

James has a dual dimension. This is important to remember. If we turn the healing directives into a magic formula for the here and now – press these buttons and all will be well right now – then we may well be confused and sad.

So, what is James saying in 5:7-20? He's picking up again what he said in his opening to the letter – *perseverance* and *practice*. This is a massive challenge to any Christian community – to persevere when there is pressure and persecution but to do so in the spirit and practice of holiness.

What qualities of holiness does James expect?

1. *Patience* v.7 Like the farmer awaiting the harvest, the poor are to persevere in patience, focusing their hope on the Christ who will return and will judge. Pressure and stress will always threaten unity – 'irritation with people' opens the door to gossip, which then opens the floodgate to grumbling. The really alarming truth is that such complaining against believers, whilst perhaps trivial in our eyes, actually qualifies for the judgment of God! This issue of patient endurance is so crucial that James spends another 3 verses illustrating it from the life of Job. We struggle with the idea of pain and perseverance. We want to be in control but then we hit issues like unemployment, recession, illness, physical dependence, and suddenly we realize that actually we're *not* in control.
2. *Honesty* v.12 James has already spoken about speech and now he mentions oaths, which were rejected in the NT. This took the form of the prohibition of the use of the divine name and the call for simple, honest

speech. James uses a present tense here which suggests that he is prohibiting an existing practice. *All* our speech is to be truthful, not just the bits to which we attach oaths! Again, this is in light of the coming judgment of God.

3. *Prayer* v.13 'Are you in trouble?' One of 22 questions asked by James. 'Trouble' = physical circumstances, misfortune and personal situations which produce distress and inner turmoil. Call to God and trust him to act wisely. Wisdom is what we need from God and for ourselves, based on the power and love of God.
4. *Praise* v. 13 We should be conscious of God not only in distressing circumstances but also in delightful circumstances.
5. *Compassion for wanderers* v. 19-20 How often do people ask us what our younger son asked me a few years ago, albeit somewhat in jest, 'Well, Delboy, how's your soul?' How often do we ask each other such a question? James feared that community members might reject the revealed will of God and live contrary to that will.. This is not just about doctrinal truth. The Hebrew mind held truth and lifestyle as inseparable – orthodoxy of belief *and* orthopraxis of life. James wants to ask us 'Are we watching out for one another?' Our culture today discourages enquiry, intervention and intrusion into each other's lives. Needy people suffer in silence and their spiritual and personal needs go unmet in a wilderness.
6. *Trust in God* when our lives are in the deep anguish of ill health vv. 14-18. This is a sensitive issue and still a mysterious one. The biblical procedure here seems to be a rock-solid promise, a guarantee of physical healing, and yet, to put it bluntly, it doesn't always work! The danger then is that we might start to apportion 'blame' and since we start from the position that God doesn't get things wrong , then we begin to suggest that perhaps the sick person is somehow secretly sinful or lacking in faith, such that physical healing does not come! A triple whammy for the sick person – ill, sinful and faithless!!

Let's affirm some positives from the biblical text –

- a) It is God's supernatural power that brings healing – not the special gift of a particular person. The elders involved were not required to possess an individual gift of healing. Sickness involved the community.
- b) The prayer of faith was a prayer that expressed trust in God that arose out of a life surrendered to the Lord.
- c) The faith is from the elders, not the sick person, who may not be in any state to exercise faith.

- d) The normal result is healing and that healing comes from the Lord Himself.
- e) Sin can be, but not necessarily is, the cause of illness. If the sick person *has* sinned, he/she will find spiritual as well as physical healing. Clear-cut interpretation is not easy because all the terms used here *can* refer to spiritual/eschatological healing – though physical is most likely – *and* James wants spiritual, communal harmony as well as personal healing.
- f) The word ‘therefore’ in v. 16 does suggest that in James’s mind, there is a link of some sort between healing and forgiveness of sin. It seems that confession of sins in a community was done as a public procedure. That surely requires great honesty, but then James has talked about this in 5:12. The confession cleanses the community from sin and this opens up the way for mutual prayer which probably included further communal prayer for healing of the sick through mutual forgiveness. Confession and forgiveness are necessary if healing is to be expected in a Christian community. Perhaps that is a measure of just how central confession and forgiveness are in church life. Such people, like Elijah, are the ‘righteous’ and they are powerful in prayer, even though it remains true that the power and energy lie in God’s response to our prayers, *not* in the energy that *we* invest in prayer. God *does* heal physically – sometimes the healing comes, sometimes not. A mystery! The procedure in 5:14-18 should be followed and we should affirm the reality of divine healing.

We need to hold this reality of physical healing in the wider context of James –

- i) All physical healing in a real sense is temporary.
- ii) We need to seek the will of God in all things 4:15.
- iii) The *character* of God encompasses all healing 5:11.
- iv) God’s main aim for us through time into eternity is maturity and completeness 1:4.

At some point in life, the prayer for healing will appear not to work and the sick person will actually die.

Some of the most powerful testimonies come from believers who are *not* physically healed yet continue to live for God’s honour and glory.

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