

Over the last few months we have been asked to become 'more courageous for Christ' in the way we share our faith and the gospel message in and beyond Dorking. The Good and Beautiful Life series encouraged us to be deliberate in finding the critical next step God would like us to take on our journey with Him towards Christlikeness. The Covenant series has knit the Old and the New Testaments together, revealing what God is doing in the context of human wickedness: His patient mercy climaxes in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Through faith in Him we receive forgiveness of sins, the assurance of eternal life and the presence of the Holy Spirit to empower us to become more like Jesus. The book of James has a lot of complementary practical advice.

1. Introduction to the Book of James. Read James 1: 1.

- The author of the book is 'James, servant of God and servant of the Lord Jesus Christ'. But which James?
- Most probably Jesus' half-brother: **Mark 6: 1-6a**. Jesus had at least 4 half-brothers & several half-sisters. People were beginning to take offence at His claims and His family were embarrassed by Him calling God His Father & hinting He is the Messiah: **Mark 3: 31-35**. Unpopular in devout, conservative Jewish Galilee.
- **John 7: 1-5**. Jesus was avoiding His enemies in Judea because a plot was being hatched to kill Him. His brothers, including James, were colluding with the would-be assassins: telling Him to go to the Feast of Tabernacles. How did James move from potential murderer to a 'pillar of the Church in Jerusalem'?

2. Paul's Testifies to James' Conversion.

- In Galatians 1 Paul meets Peter and James to satisfy them that he, Paul, had converted to Christianity. Then in Galatians 2: 7-10 he refers to James, Peter and John as 'pillars', i.e. *established on Gospel Truth*.
- James was respected and became the Leader of the Church in Jerusalem. In Acts 15 at the Council of Jerusalem he made the important statement in verses 19 & 20 absolving Gentile Christians from circumcision and adherence to the law. This was practical wisdom from a devout Christian Jewish man.
- How has James changed from embarrassed, heretical half-brother to a pillar of the Church in Jerusalem?
- **1 Corinthians 15: 3-8**. Jesus appeared to James after His resurrection and it would appear this led to his conversion and that of his brothers, who are mentioned among the believers in **Acts 1:14**. An encounter with his dead half-brother by crucifixion & now raised to life changes James from antagonist to servant.

3. James' Contribution to our Understanding of Christianity.

- James was a devout Jewish man known as 'Old Camel Knees' because he spent so much time at the Temple in prayer. For him practical action and prayer were not polar opposites: faith and deeds are as one.
- James' Jewish expression of his faith saw prayer as contemplative and spiritual, inextricably bound with practical action that issued from prayer and always 'remembered the poor'. Over-emphasis of the truth of 'justification by faith' can lead to forgetting that sanctification and discipleship come through effort.
- 'Faith doesn't come to an end with our certainty of God's existence. Rather it sparks in us a yearning for the ability to communicate with a God beyond excellence. Prayer and musical worship help but God asks for more than an inner attitude: He gives us life and also law, he wants to be served as well as adored, obeyed as well as worshipped. This will involve restraint, self-control, courage and submission but our prayer and practice will culminate in genuine service to Christ and for God. Faith on its own is a mirage.' (Taken from 'Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity' by Abraham Joshua Heschel.)
- Our 'spiritual peaks' don't necessarily come during moments of ecstasy. They come in living; they come in the common deed: waking up, breakfast with the kids, getting them to school, the daily commute, e-mails, databases, the shopping run, supporting elderly relatives, planning a holiday, the evening rituals. Live these out in worship to God and we will find that prayer and practice become the same thing.

Aims for this series:

Read James remembering the lessons from 'The Good and Beautiful Life' & the Covenant series. Learn to be servants of the Lord Jesus through prayer and practice. Prayer empowers and informs action and the two hold hands together so that action becomes the prayer. Take the wisdom and commands from Scripture seriously so we grow as disciples and demonstrate our servitude to God and the Lord Jesus Christ, and our reliance on the Holy Spirit.

