

Two Year Bible Trek
Week 100
James

Key Concepts: The key concept in James is that faith and actions cannot be separated.

Background: No one is certain who wrote James, but it is a sermon couched as a letter. The sermon focuses on how Christians ought to live.

Brief Summary: Salutation and Dealing with Trials (1:1-1:18) The greeting is from James which is followed by words of encouragement to those facing trials. Believers are to know that trials yield steadfastness, not defeat. Those who are tested and remain faithful will receive the crown of life. The temptations that test us are not from God, for God does not tempt but gives humanity only good and perfect gifts.

Real Religion (1:19-1:27) Real religion consists of being quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger, putting away wickedness, doing the Word, bridling the tongue, visiting orphans and widows, and keeping oneself unstained by the world.

Dealing with Class Differences (2:1-2:13) One of the great issues within the life of any church, including the early church, was the different treatment given to those who are rich and those who are poor. The writer begins by reminding the church not to show “partiality” between classes. The example given has to do with how people are treated when they come to church. If the wealthy are given preferential seating and the poor are told to stand in a corner, then the poor have been disrespected. By showing this kind of partiality, the church members have violated the rule to love our neighbors as ourselves. This section concludes with the reminder that those who show no mercy will receive no mercy, yet mercy will triumph over judgment.

Faith means Works (2:14-2:26) The writer makes it clear that one cannot have a faith that does not show itself in works of love and compassion. The example offered is of a hungry person coming to the church and the church merely saying, “Go in peace.” Not helping them shows that the faith of the church is dead. This is summed up in the fact that works are what demonstrate the existence of faith. Abraham is lifted up as one who proved his faith by what he did (seemingly different from Paul’s use of Abraham as an example of faith).

Real Wisdom (3:1-3:18) One of the essentials for a Christ-like life is to have wisdom. Wisdom is demonstrated in mastering one’s tongue (the tongue can be a deadly fire and be filled with poison), doing good works, avoiding jealousy and selfish ambition, and being pure, peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good works and setting aside uncertainty and insincerity.

Worldly Living is the Problem (4:1-5:6) Greed, pride, speaking evil against others, judging and boasting are at the heart of the evils of the world. These problems bring about war, murder and fraud as people do whatever it takes to acquire more and more. The warning is offered that those who store up for themselves, living in luxury while others suffer will see all they have becoming rotted and moth-ridden. A central admonition is “whoever knows what is right and fails to do it, for him is sin.”

More Encouragement (5:7-5:20) The sermon concludes with a reminder to be patient and wait for the coming of the Lord. In the meantime, believers are to be straightforward (your yes is your yes and your no is your no), prayerful, cheerful, worshipful, willing to call upon the elders for assistance, willing to confess one’s sins and willing to work to bring back into the community those who have fallen away.

1. What is your favorite piece of advice from this letter?
2. How do you square James’ statements about faith and works with Paul’s focus on faith alone?
3. How might this letter help us be a better church?