



## WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT?

### INTRODUCTION

Today we come to the end of our series in the book of James! It has been such a practical book... dealing with such a wide range of topics. Today as we wrap up the series... I felt I wanted to go back... and highlight some of the key takeaways... but more than that... make sure that we have taken what God is saying to us as a church to heart. We can sometimes rush through a series... and move on so quickly... that we don't always let the Word of God impact us... the way He wants it to impact us.

So today I want to highlight the really important things that God has been saying to us over the past few Sundays... So the message today is called;

### WHAT IS REALLY IMPORTANT?

I remember when I used to live on the Fish Hoek mountainside a few years ago... and we had those nasty fires and we all had to be evacuated. And I remember telling my friend Scott, "In times like this, you are forced to decide on what is really important in life, so I've worked it out, and here it is, my wife, my kids, and my bakkie!" So what is really important to you?? And in our message today, Pastor James would suggest 5 things... And here is the first;

#### 1. WHAT YOU DO IS IMPORTANT (NOT JUST WHAT YOU BELIEVE)

You see friends... What you do... speaks much louder... than what you say. What you do is really important, not just what you believe. Now, before someone hears me wrong here. Let me explain. What you believe is extremely important. If what you believe is wrong, if what you believe is skew, where you end up is wrong and skew.

We have a lot of people who have this idea in their heads, that as long as you “believe right” you can live and do whatever you please. And that just won’t work! So you need to believe right.

But you also need to do right. We are living in a world... where people want to see if Christians are for real. That we walk the talk. If you come to church, and you talk the talk, but out there, you don’t walk the walk, there’s a problem. And Pastor James is a solid gospel on the ground kind of guy. So he says, “You’ve got to walk it like you talk it!” Practice what you preach.

And here again, there is an extreme where people push the works side too much, and think that they can just ‘behave their way’ to salvation. And that is just not what James is saying! Scripture is very clear that salvation is not something we can earn... it is a ‘gift from God’ offered... because of what Jesus did on the cross... so than none of us can boast! So James, who was a great man of both faith and action, say’s, if you believe it, do it!

### **James 1:22-25**

***Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. <sup>23</sup> Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror <sup>24</sup> and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. <sup>25</sup> But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.***

And again in James chapter 2;

### **James 2:26**

***As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.***

Let me remind you today that you can only be saved only by God’s grace. You cannot earn or work for your salvation. It is a free-gift PAID IN FULL by the FINISHED WORK of Jesus on the cross. But... this should lead to a changed life and should produce some fruit. Let your FAITH result in ACTION, for faith without action is dead and useless.

To quote one of our preachers from the series; “Eating cheese does not make you a mouse, just like going to church doesn’t make one a Christian. In the same way, faith without action is useless!” It’s like a beautiful bunch of fake flowers. Looks good. But it’s not the real deal. It’s dead. So when it comes to your faith... live it out. Do it!

But here is the second thing that came through strongly as we went through this series;

## **2. HOW YOU TREAT OTHERS IS IMPORTANT**

How we treat others... says a lot about us. And James has taught us, that our faith, is closely tied to the way we treat one another. Especially those within the Church!

Remember, James was working with a really diverse congregation... so they were bound to have issues! So he said to them in chapter 2;

#### **James 2:8-9**

***If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, “Love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing right. <sup>9</sup> But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers.***

Now I know you beautiful bunch of spiritual people have never had a discriminatory bone in your body, right? Mmmmm. Not so sure. I think we all have problem with this. Me too. Anyone who claims to never have had thoughts of favoritism and discrimination is either lying or living in denial. So we got to own it, and we got to deal with it, because God doesn't like it. We have got so much discrimination and racial tension in our country at present. And as Gods Children, we need to make a positive difference, we need to lead the way.

So – in short. Don't show favouritism. Do not discriminate. God is the God of all who believe in Him, and all who are part of God's Kingdom are ONE in Christ. Irrespective of colour, or social standing, Gods Kingdom is colour-blind and class-free, so DO NOT show favouritism. Clinton when he shared said – “Rather show undeserved favour and love to all people. Show FAVOUR instead of FAVORITISM!”

But this also comes into how we treat those who might work for us, or are junior to us in the company for which we work, or in a lower grade at school, look at James 5;

#### **James 5:4**

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

God is interested in how we treat people. Your faith is not private business! Your faith should impact your relationships and honour God. If you are involved in volatile relationships, and its always a big story around you - full of drama, or you are bearing grudges or anger... then there's a problem – and it is a faith issue as well.

We so quick to compartmentalise our lives – we think; faith is 'private', relationships are 'separate', work is 'something else' – but God has designed us as a whole integrated person who lives in community.

So remember church... How you treat others is important. The way you treat people sets the standard for others. Linking to this... is those famous words on the tongue! So here is point number 3;

### **3. HOW YOU SPEAK IS IMPORTANT**

#### **James 3:6-12**

***The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup> All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures***

***are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, <sup>8</sup> but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. <sup>9</sup> With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness.***

***<sup>10</sup> Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. <sup>11</sup> Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? <sup>12</sup> My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water.***

Words can kill... or build someone up and give life – too often we speak without thinking through what we are saying, but words are powerful. So do not speak in haste... and do not speak in anger. We are made in the image of God – His words are powerful – He spoke creation, including us into being. Likewise, we should be speaking life, and not death over others.

So... What words are you sowing into the lives of people around you? Your colleagues? Your family? Your loved ones? Words of life, or words of criticism and negativity. It is important how we speak. But let's move on... number 4...

#### **4. YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IS IMPORTANT**

While some tend to overlook the book of James... thinking it is not 'spiritual enough' there is a huge focus on our relationship with God in James – and he says it is so important, because it is when we consider ourselves... and our desires king... then we have trouble in our relationships with others...and with God. So James says in chapter 4;

##### **James 4:7-10**

***Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. <sup>10</sup> Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.***

It's a sobering reminder that our relationship with God is very important. We need to keep a proper perspective – God is in charge – He is all powerful, He is almighty, He is our creator – and we need to submit to Him, not the other way around.

When you examine your life... who are you submitting too? Who is in charge of your life? If it is anyone other than God Himself... you will see the symptoms in difficult relationships.

So how is your relationship with God my friend? As you sit here today. Do you feel like you could say – I am walking closely and humbly before my God. Or do you feel a million miles away from him today? If that's you. Do something about that.

Let's look at the next thing that came out...

## 5. WHERE YOU TURN... WHEN THINGS GO WRONG... IS IMPORTANT

We looked at this last week.. and let me just say how blown away I was so see so many of you come forward for prayer. It was such a special time... all brought on by these words in chapter 5;

### James 5:13-16

*Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up.*

*If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.*

We need to be doing more of this church. We need to put what God says into practice in our lives. So where do you turn when things go wrong?

This week has been such a surreal time as a pastor here... there has just been so much feeling like it has 'gone wrong.' I did a memorial service last Saturday. And then... David's dad passes away, Anne Rawsthorne passes away, Rae Leeman passes away, Marie Steven's passes away. I mean, you get to a point where you want to say, Lord – that's enough now! Please Father. So here's my question to you... where do you turn when things go wrong? I want to encourage you to turn to the Lord. Come forward for prayer. Come let the Elders lay hands on you. Press into God.

In prayer... we submit to God's power and authority – we don't demand, but as His children we come before Him, knowing He is the one who is in control.

So... How have you been doing in applying God's word through James in your life? There are some very practical challenges and for me the one I keep going back to is this, and I will close with this one...

## 6. HAVING A REAL RELIGION IS IMPORTANT

You know what gets me down... when I hear people say things like, "Never do business with a Christian!" Or, "Christians are such hypocrites." Now I know, people are just looking for an excuse to criticise Christians, and I know, we are just people like everyone else. We mess up. We make mistakes. But we have to realize that our world is looking for Christians who are real, and genuine! Friends, we don't do "fake it till you make it Christianity!" We have to be sincere and real in our faith.

Now we never had much time to focus on it at the time... but there is a verse I want to come back to, and end with today... and it's this one...

## James 1:27

***Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.***

I think the word religion gets a bad wrap. But I know why. Religion can so quickly miss the point. Religion can become self-righteous. You can develop a ugly religious spirit. But friends, there is such a thing as RELIGION done right... and at its core, it's about a RELATIONSHIP with Jesus, and a faith that is lived out and impacts the world. So what does that look like?

James says this; "Religion that is acceptable to God... over flows into our relationship with others and the most vulnerable in our lives."

In James day... it was the widows and orphans who were the most vulnerable. A lady whose husband died in those days was expected to either re-marry... or return to her family. Often, they lived in poverty... or had to turn to prostitution to make ends meet. Orphans were even more vulnerable... as they were dependant on extended family to care for them... and often had their rightful inheritance (if they had any) taken away and misused. So Pastor James said to the believers, church, if you want to have a religion that is pure and faultless – live it out, by helping the vulnerable.

Who are the vulnerable today that we need to be caring for? Is it the unemployed? The poor? We need to think through and see who we should be caring for as it is our responsibility – it is all part of loving God.

So this felt like a good opportunity to share about one of our ministries in the church. Because there are a number of families who have been doing this for the 'orphans' and vulnerable children in our community. Hope4Babies (previously known as the baby safe) is a ministry of people seeking to help parents going through the tough decisions about possibly giving up their children. They are caring for babies who have been left and helping mums who have come forwards in desperate need.

On the other hand... we have people who have taken in children – either in foster settings or by adoption and practically loved and cared for children. This is faith in action! This is what God say's pure religion looks like – it pleases God.

But in our area there is such a huge need. There are so many vulnerable children – there is a shortage of foster families. Church, we are doing well, but we can do so much better.

There is a clip that I would like you to watch, after which I have asked Mari Walker to come up and share a bit... thank you.

**Hope4Babies Clip**

**Mari**



## **CONCLUSION**

So what is your response to God's word today? What do you think is really important? What is God saying to you?

Have you been putting your faith into action?

Have you been treating people the way God wants you to treat others?

Have you been speaking in a way that is honouring to God and honouring to others?

How is your relationship with God? Right now.

Where do you turn when things go wrong? Have you been turning to the Lord. Have you been too proud to come forward for prayer in the front of the church during ministry time?

And how would people describe your religion by what they know of you? Would it be acceptable to God? Would it be pure and faultless, because of the way you have loved and served the vulnerable around you?

Church I urge you not to go from here and do nothing - don't be like the guy we were warned about in James chapter one – who listened to the word, but after going away, forgot it all, and did not do what God wanted. Let's close in prayer.