

## Chat with the Children

- Get large houseplant from Lounge to front of church...
    - talk about how to make sure it grows...
    - watering, pruning, compost, feeding, size of container...
  - How do we grow as Christians?
  - *Prayer: Lord help us to grow...*
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## Introduction

- "Physician, heal thyself!"
  - feel this is very close to home, personally!!
- Take a whistle stop tour through the book of James over next few weeks.
  - learn from James' very down to earth approach to life and to faith.
- Want to do two things this morning:
  - first, make something of an **introduction to the book**. Not simply for the sake of knowing, but so understand something of **context** James' concerns come from, and can hopefully more easily see how we can apply from his day to ours.
  - second, explore a **few of the verses from chapter one** that we read earlier in a little more detail, as they act as the **key that unlocks the way James thinks**, and illuminates one of his key concerns.

## The Book of James

- We have here a letter - an open letter - knowing something of sender and recipient will help us navigate.

### Author: James ("**James**" image)

- James - **unqualified by any description** - yet writes with authority - **suggests well-known**.
- Only two well known James:
  - **James, son of Zebedee, brother of John**, one of 12 (Mk 1:19; 5:37; etc);
  - **James the Lord's brother**, head of church in Jerusalem (Gal 1:19; 2:9; Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18).
- James brother of John killed really very early - **Acts 12:2** - Herod had him killed (this morning's sermon!)
- So **most likely James the Lord's brother**, who came to recognise Jesus' Lordship only after his death and resurrection.
  - head of church in Jerusalem
  - pastor, concerned to see people grow, not just come to faith.

### Recipients: **The twelve tribes scattered** (map image)

- Who is James writing to?
  - GNB 1:1 - "**To all God's people scattered throughout the world**"
  - NIV 1:1 - "**To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations**"
- Twelve tribes as Jewish way of saying **God's people**
  - in Christian context says the new people of God, not simply the Jews.
- Could be anyone, anywhere, at anytime - **as the GNB phrases it**.
- Quite probably had a **more particular group** in mind originally.
- James was pastor of the Jerusalem church - **relationship with his flock**.
  - Acts 11:19 - people scattered after Stephen's death, Jewish Christians spread not quite far and wide, but not just locally either - up & down the Eastern Mediterranean.
  - the Jewish way of phrasing things, allusions to OT, and so on suggest a Jewish audience - reference to spring & autumn rains in 5:7; unique to E.Med!

- So, probably parts of James' own church scattered after persecution.
- Hence warmth - "greetings", "my brothers", "my dear brothers", (brothers - 15 times!) of a pastor's heart, and also concern for their welfare.
- James not full of great theological argument and insight:
  - as their Pastor, James knows them to be well taught
  - but of "how to" advice, encouragement and challenge to keep on living all-out for Christ.

### Structure (glasses image)

- All of that helps explain the structure of the book - or lack of it!
  - full of little bits of advice and guidance, apparently unrelated.
  - nuggets to be applied - they know the big picture, just need help applying it to the nitty-gritty of daily life.
- Despite having said that there is little structure, reasoned argument, we can see areas of particular concern:
- Worth picking out three from the middle of the book:
  - attitudes to wealth and poverty (favouritism), cashed out in action (James 2)
  - how we use our tongues/words... (large chunk of James 3)
  - concern for personal purity in an unclean world (mostly James 4)
  - (these are picked out in James 1:26, 27 - pointers for what's to come.)
- We'll also pick up on those broad areas over the next three weeks.
- And after that we'll round off, as James does in chapter 5, looking at the way of life that should characterise the mature Christian.
- That's James - the author, the destination, the structure:

### James 1:19-27 (plant growth image)

- In all of that, the thing that really concerned him, that got him uptight, that made write this letter, we find towards the end of chapter one
- Turn our attention there now.
- After the greetings (v.1), James has highlighted a number of areas of practical concern:
  - facing trials and persecution (v.2-4);
  - lacking wisdom, knowing what to do (v.5-8);
  - attitudes of rich & poor Christians (v.9-11);
  - trials & particularly temptations (v.12-15).
- Any kind of connection?
  - well, yes - a desire for maturity, for growth in faith, for development and progress.
  - don't stay still - grow, deepen, develop.
- That's what James wants to see among his brothers, scattered now around the Eastern Mediterranean.
  - and that's his goal in writing, the encouragement of that growth

### Be Doers, not merely Hearers

- **HOW?**
- How does James see this happening?
  - in every area, let me suggest, it is by doing, by obeying, by translating knowledge into action.
- That's the key to understanding James.
  - if we read and understood all he had to say about trials, about temptation, about riches, about the words we use, about favouritism, he'd have failed.
  - he doesn't want us to understand, but to do.
- A few years ago I was hopeless with plants - hadn't a clue - killed them off!
  - one Christmas, my sister gave me a Parasol Plant.

- came in an M&S plastic bag - didn't water or remove plastic for a week while at parents for Christmas... **nearly dead!**
- got it home - since it was a present from my sister I felt I **must do something!**
- **Baby Bio! Fertilised, window, water.**
- Once I got the right combination...
  - ...it grew, and grew, and grew!!
  - by the time it finally died, maybe 6 or 7 years later, it touched the roof of our house in Motherwell from a pot on the floor!
  - *(in fact, bent over at roof, and eventually fell over too many times - kind of threatening!!)*
- James is talking to people in whom God's word, the gospel message, has been planted and has started to grow (v.18, 21).
  - God is at work in them through his word.
  - James is concerned to see them grow.
- What fertiliser does he use?
  - **Obedience** - putting things into practice.
- v.22 - *"Do not deceive yourselves by just listening to his word; instead, put it into practice."*
- **Deception!** If we merely listen to God's word, the good news of the gospel and that Gospel's demands on our lives, we are **deceiving ourselves**.
  - we think we are doing OK
  - our understanding is growing, know more of Scripture, whatever.
- Deceiving ourselves! - **that isn't real growth.**
- **Baby walkers** - did you know that they can actually hinder baby learning to walk?
  - it **appears** baby is more able to get around
  - but that's a **deception**, since real progress is being hampered
  - necessary skills of **balance** and development of the **muscle strength** necessary for walking are hampered
- **We want real growth, not the appearance of growth**
  - learning and understanding are a necessary of that, but they mustn't be mistaken for the growth itself
  - we must **apply what we hear & learn.**
- James' own illustration is of a mirror:
  - a man sees, but doesn't change action based on what he sees - doesn't comb hair or wash face or...
- That's the same kind of deception:
  - he **thinks mirror has helped, but without action** he is just deceiving himself
  - it of itself makes no difference to his appearance.
- Contrast is drawn with the person who gazes into God's law and doesn't simply listen:
  - rather, **puts it into practice** - that's the person who God blesses (v.25)
  - We won't grow as God's children unless we learn to put into practice what we learn.
- I don't know what particular area in your life God might be shining his spotlight on just now - something we've touched on in church over past few weeks, or from your own reading of Scripture, or just where the Holy Spirit has been bothering your conscience - whatever:
  - God's call is the same - **don't just learn, live!**
- Respond, not by sitting under the sound of God's word and saying **"that was a good word - God blessed me tonight"**, but by obeying.
  - go and make **reconciliation** with the person you've become estranged from;
  - change your pattern of **giving** to God's work;
  - grow in your **involvement** in his service.
- Just do it!
  - v.25 - **"that person will be blessed by God in what he does."**

## Conclusion

- Story is told of the pastor of a small church.
  - faithfully preached week by week.
  - loved by his people, who grew steadily in their understanding.
  - one Sunday morning they came to church as usual, only to find the building locked!
  - Closer inspection revealed a sign on the door:
    - *"You have been listening long enough. Now go and do it!"*
- Certainly would cut down on sermon preparation for next week if I did that!
- **Let us not merely be hearers of the word, but doers, and may God grant us his Spirit's enabling so to do.**