

James 5

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[0 : 00] If you turn to James chapter 5, please again. Anyone here in primary school?

Anyone here say under the age of 15? I'd forgotten about this. Just discovered this box from Easter time with the Easter eggs in them.

I'm pretty sure that there were more Easter eggs in this box when I left them than there currently is. And I'm grateful to those who clean the church.

Kind of. Anyone under the age of 15? Boys and girls, beginning of the service will be done by 7. Do you want a wee chocolate break?

John, you can set the example. The rest can follow. Come on, Lewis. Katie Morag, Seanach. Grace.

[1 : 03] Caitlin. Emma. Natalie. Anna. Stuart, sit down. No one over that side, is there?

Anishia borderline. Do you want one? James chapter 5. And the...

Just by way of introduction, if I think back a week, this time last week, I was in Uist. And when I travelled to Uist, and when I normally travelled to Uist, I'd do the first 20 miles in the car from the house to Leverborough, and then over on the ferry, over the sound, and then arrive at Uist.

And the journey there, by these means, it's always picturesque, whether by land or by sea. It's picturesque as we look around, but I'm conscious that when I'm on land or on sea, you only really see a very limited area around you.

You're at ground level or you're at sea level. And so our vision, whether we're heading to Uist or anywhere else, is limited because of that. We just see what's immediately around us, as far as the eye can see.

[2 : 35] And it strikes me as we come to the end of the book of James, that's kind of the way that we study James. I know I haven't rushed through this book.

I haven't gone and taken big chunks at a time. But just each week, and sometimes we've had breaks between weeks, we just take a few verses, we take another step, and we look at the immediate lessons and applications that are packed into the three or four verses that we've been packed on in that evening.

And that's the way that we've kind of approached this book week by week. Thinking back to Uist, there was one journey, not the last one, but the time before, where it was different to all the other journeys that I've been on from Uist.

I had to fly. Every time I step onto Uist, the wind blows, and the sea seems to get rough. And the boat was cancelled on the Monday, and the boat seemed to be cancelled on the Tuesday.

And I thought, well, surely I'll get away on a later ferry on the Tuesday. Then I looked at Wednesday and Thursday and Friday, and it was just getting worse and worse. So I had one opportunity to jump on the plane.

[3 : 53] So I jumped on the plane. And when I was on the plane and flying over these islands and looking down, I was just conscious that the perspective from a plane is totally different.

You're looking at the same landmass. You're looking at the same, all the same stuff that you see. But the perspective is totally different because you get the big picture.

You're not focused on what's immediately in front of you, but you're seeing the whole big picture at one time. And that's kind of what I want to do tonight as we finish in James.

So I want to just have a glance at the big picture, as it were. I want to just glance down at it from a height. So what's the big picture in James?

We've gone step by step and bite by bite. But what's the big picture? Are there any verses that we can hang on to that kind of give us the message of James in a nutshell?

[4 : 58] And I think there are. And actually, I think probably the last two verses of the book probably best encapsulate the whole essence of the book.

James doesn't have the traditional kind of sign-off that so many of the other books in the Bible have. James, quite abruptly, just puts a full stop there. But that's characteristic of all the teaching of this book. It's been very short and sharp and focused.

Five chapters that are just jam-packed. Then he comes to the end and it's almost slightly unorthodox, the abruptness with which he finishes.

And yet, I think it captures the whole of the purpose and the theme of the book. So what is it that we can look at as we look at these last two versions?

[6 : 17] Well, the first thing we can see is that the book of James, the whole book, it's a letter. And it's a letter to brothers.

It's a letter to brothers and sisters. I've got the NIV translation 1984 here. And he says, my brothers. And this is something that comes up time and time again in the book of James. Fourteen times in the book, he addresses those that he is writing to as brothers.

He's very conscious of the family, the Christian family that he's part of and that he's writing to. Now, in the family context, if the family is strong and loving, then you can say things to each other.

And you can say them in love. And you can say things that you'd probably never say to anyone else. And you wouldn't take from anyone else. And in the family, if someone speaks to you in a direct way and tells you some home truths, hard truths, you take them.

[7 : 39] Even though you probably wouldn't take them from anyone else. Now, James is writing to those he recognizes as brothers and sisters in the faith.

And because he has that relationship with them in and through Christ. He's able to write things that hit hard and consistently, week on week.

I don't know about you, but I've been hit hard. As I'm called to look at my life. Think about what I think and say and do.

Some of this is hard. And yet those who received this letter in the first place, they receive a warning. This letter was not discarded.

It was received. It was preserved. It was taken to heart. Because those who received it, they recognized the one who was writing to them as a brother.

[8 : 40] As a pastor. As one who loves them in the Lord. A couple of weeks ago now, Katak is not back in church yet, but probably not far away.

A couple of weeks ago, Katak went into hospital. She's been struggling with a hip for a long time. And she was called up to the hospital. The surgery was scheduled.

And on the day set, she went in and she let a surgeon come near to her. And then open her leg with a knife.

And do what was necessary to improve her health and to improve her mobility. Now, if anyone else approached Katak with a knife, she'd fend them away.

You know, Cameron would hit them over the head with a flying pad. But she trusted the surgeon to have the skills and the compassion to cut her open, quite honestly.

[9 : 49] And to help. And the book of James is a book where a Holy Spirit inspired soul surgeon, in love, takes the knife first.

And he exposes it in me and in you and in those who first read this. He exposes where there are problems. Where there is pain.

And he does this in order to bring that repair. That reparation. That restoration. He does this in order that we will become more spiritually healthy and effective.

And sometimes he cuts deep. Because the problems that we have run deep. But whatever he cuts in this letter, it's done in love.

Because he recognises them. And he recognises us. As brothers. Believers in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[10 : 59] Part of the same family. So tonight, I think it would be a good exercise for us, after we go home, to read the whole book. Go home and read it.

And the whole five chapters. It won't take you long. But read the whole book. And let's pray as we do so that God, the Holy Spirit, through James, will do soul surgery on us.

Because we're constantly in need of it. So this is a letter to brothers and sisters.

That's the first thing. And that's something that's very clearly one of the obvious points in this letter. It's a letter to brothers.

The second thing is it's a letter to the wanderer. It's a letter to the wanderer. My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth.

[12:04] Now almost every week on social media, we see these posts about people who've gone missing. And they get shared, and they get shared, and they get shared far and wide.

Because their family and their friends are wondering, where are they? They're concerned for them. And so there's an effort made through social media, through these posts, to try and locate and draw back the wanderer.

This is what one of these posts, spiritually speaking, would have looked like in AD 49. James was aware that some believers were wandering away from the truth.

There was a widening disconnect between the truth that Jesus taught and the way that some of the Christians were living their lives. And the world was noticing.

And the whole reputation of Jesus was suffering. And James, the pastor, he writes with that pastoral love and concern in order to address these problems.

[13:13] And to call the wanderer back to the truth. The last point, we highlighted the word brother, or brother and sister, depending on your translation.

Now, if we do a search on the word brother, and just use a concordance, and see where it is that James is addressing these brothers. Where it is that he has issues he needs to raise.

Even in doing that, we see so many examples of how the church, of God's people, they were wandering away from the truth. They were wandering away from Scripture.

They were wandering away from the way that Jesus would have them live. And James is calling them back. Let me just take a few examples.

James 1.19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

[14:19] It seems they were wandering away from that. Slow to listen. Quick to speak. Quick to blow up in anger. James is calling them back from that.

James 2.1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, must not show favoritism. Some were being elevated in the church when they shouldn't have been, and others were being put down.

And James is calling them back from the sin of that. James 2.14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds, can such faith save them?

Some people were saying, I'm a Christian. I'm a believer. I'm a saved person. I'm a disciple of Jesus. And yet there was no evidence of that in the way that he lived.

In fact, there was much evidence that showed that actually there didn't seem to be much in the way of faith at all. And James doesn't let that lie.

[15:27] He speaks directly to them. And he explains at length how faith must be accompanied by deeds, that if we are saved, then the works of salvation will be seen in the way that we live.

James 3.10 Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.

They're wandering from the way that they should speak. There's praise and there's cursing coming from the same lips. James 3.10 He's calling them back to God's standard, not what was actually happening in these fellowships.

Chapter 4, verse 11. Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Why would he need to write that? Because they were wandering away from that patience and that love for each other and they were slandering one another.

James is calling them back. 5.7 Be patient then, brothers and sisters, until the Lord's coming. Why does he write that? They seem to have lost patience and lost sight of the fact that the Lord was coming.

[16:52] They're wandering from that truth. James is calling them back. Chapter 5, verse 9. Don't grumble against one another, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged.

The judge is standing at the door. There was grumbling. There was speak against each other.

They're forgetting that Jesus is hearing and seeing. So James reminds them and calls them back. And so on.

We could go through. I've got more. That's enough, I think. This is a letter to brothers. And it's a letter to brothers that James loved who were wandering from the truth.

Wandering from that genuine, sincere, godly Christian life. And wandering into the world. And James, the Holy Spirit guides him.

[17 : 52] He pulls them back. Have we heard the voice of God through James over these months?

I would guess that we have. I certainly have in preparation. We often sing, prone to wander. Lord, I feel it.

Prone to leave the God we love. And James is a book. It's a letter. It's addressed to the wanderer. The brother. Who's prone to wanderer. And sometimes our wandering can be willful.

And it can be rebellious. Sometimes we're aware of it. Sometimes there can be someone that comes into our lives. That takes us away from the Lord.

[18 : 52] They become much more important to us than the Lord. The whole shape of our lives changes. And we're taken into sin. And sometimes the wandering is far more subtle.

Sometimes it can be an idol that rises up in our lives. And we wander consciously into disobedience. But we love that thing too much. But more often than not, the wandering that we are prone to is more of an unconscious drift.

Sometimes, you know, there are these lilacs. Jonathan, have you ever been on these inflatable lilac things?

And you can lie on them and you can be in the sea. You can sort of do sunbathing. You can be in a pool. You know what I'm talking about? I think you do, yeah. You pump them up and they're like a bed.

And they float. And you can lie back in Luskentire Beach and just flap around with your arms like this. Now, if you're on one of these things, they're lovely and you can move about.

[19 : 57] But if you fall asleep on one of these things in Luskentire Beach, or just off Luskentire Beach in the water, you wake up and you're in Taran Sea. It's happened to Farrakhar six times. Because there's that pool of the tide.

There's that drift. And when we're sleeping, we get pulled in the direction of the tide. And more often than not, that's how we wander spiritually. We go to sleep.

We forget that there is a tide in this world and it's constantly pulling us away from Jesus. And James is that letter that's designed to wake up the wanderer.

It's that letter that's designed to call the wanderer back to the truth. Back to Jesus, who is the truth. So we need to heed this. We need to heed this when we detect wandering in our own hearts.

And we need to be alert to the wandering that there can be in the lives of our brothers and sisters. I think we're far too terrified today as a fellowship of each other.

[21 : 10] We live in a day where things are so much more individualistic. We're so much more private than we used to be. Everyone is terrified to say anything to their neighbor.

But James makes clear to us, as God speaks through him, that when we become alert to wandering in the lives of our brothers and sisters, we should reach out and love to them.

And try and encourage them back. And they may not like it. But if we love them, we'll take that risk. Alec Mateer, the commentator, says, James brings us within the local church and urges us to watch for anyone who is losing grip on truth and in whose way of life the error of sin is showing itself.

Of course, we must not sit back and do nothing when we see these things in the wider canvas of society or of our denomination. Though more often than not, we find ourselves at a loss at what to do.

[22 : 23] But within the local fellowship, we dare not treat truth and life as negotiable. So, it is our task to care and to rescue.

So, we, like James, are to look out for the wanderer. We're to look out for those seats that are increasingly empty.

We're to look out for those who are struggling and who are drifting. And a lover to reach out to them.

That's one of the lessons from this letter. And all the lessons that James passes on to us are lessons that you learn from Jesus. So, this is a letter to brothers and sisters.

It's a letter to the wanderer. And thirdly, it's a series of lessons from Jesus. Look at verse 19.

[23 : 38] We're still there. My brothers, if, and I've underlined here these next three words. If one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back.

And so he goes on. If one of you should wander from the truth. Now, as you read that, one who wanders from the truth, where does your mind go?
If you go to any particular passage, well, my mind goes to Matthew 18. Where Jesus speaks about the 99 sheep and the one that is wayward.
The one that wanders. Matthew 18. Let's go there just for a moment. I'm watching time. Verse 12 of Matthew 18. Jesus is teaching here.
Again, think about the emphasis that James places here. If even one of you should wander from the truth. And Jesus is speaking here. And he says in verse 12.
[24 : 59] What do you think if a man owns a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away? Will he not leave the 99 on the hills and go to look for the one that has wandered off?
And if he finds it, I tell you the truth. He's happier about that one sheep than about the 99 that did not wander off. In the same way, your father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.
So as we hear James address us in this letter, if one should wander from the truth, actually what we're hearing is Jesus.
And it makes perfect sense that we would be hearing that repetition of what Jesus is saying. Because the Holy Spirit of Jesus is the one who's inspiring James to write.
The Spirit of Jesus is fueling that loving pastoral concern for the straying sheep that James has.
[26 : 04] The good shepherd doesn't do a quick calculation, a very quick scan of numbers and say, well, the majority of the flock are here. That's good enough for me.
No, the good shepherd knows all the sheep by name. And he cares for every last one of them. And if even one should go wandering from him, he goes out looking, he goes out searching.
He goes out calling them back. And James is a letter where we hear Jesus, in very practical, gritty, searching terms, calling back the wandering lost sheep.
I see sheep every day. I don't own any sheep. But I think I probably see more sheep in close proximity to me than some people who do own sheep.
I see sheep every day. And they're wandering around in the garden. And they're up and they're down the road. And they're here and there. And probably half a dozen times a day I'm in the study and I hear the screeching of tires as they just come within a foot of the sheep.
[27 : 20] Last weekend, one of the sheep got stuck in a fence. The tourist was passing. There was a huge alarm. I think the emergency services got called out. There was a huge rammy.
See, the sheep on the car are sheep that seem to get themselves into terrible, dangerous situations. I don't know where they've wandered from, but they're forever wandering into danger. And they're just like us. I have a constant reminder of myself as I look out the window. So often we're wandering into danger and spiritual trouble.
Our tongues get us into trouble. As we say things sometimes that we shouldn't. Our feet get us into trouble when we sometimes go places we shouldn't.
And other times we don't go places we should. Our eyes get us into trouble when we sometimes look down on people. And James addresses that. And our eyes get us into trouble when we sometimes look up to people.
[28 : 33] They're taking us off on a wayward track. And we envy them when we covet their stuff for ourselves. Our ears get us into trouble when we listen to gossip and slander.
And James has written at length on that. And these are all examples of how we wander. And Jesus knows it all.
Jesus still sees his wandering sheep. And he commissions James to call us back to himself. So this letter may have the signature of James on it.
But these are clearly lessons from Jesus. And this letter is a call to listen to these lessons from Jesus.
And this letter is a call to look to Jesus. And that's what we finish tonight. We finish looking to Jesus.
[29 : 40] It's a letter to the brothers. It's a letter to the wanderer. These are lessons from Jesus. And this is a letter that calls us firmly to look to Jesus.
Some accuse James of being a faith by works man. Some people are not keen on the letter of James because they say, well, he seems to be overlooking Jesus.
He seems to be overlooking grace. He seems to be focusing too much on the way that we live. But I think that's a lot of nonsense.

Yes, James calls us out on our wonderings. He calls us out on our sin. He calls us to repent and to seek to live lives where we're not speaking out of turn.

But we're trying to control our tongues with God's strength. James calls us to live lives where we're not growling at each other. But we're being patient.

[30 : 44] James calls us to be a fellowship where we don't have favorites. There are no cliques. But we love each other equally.

As brothers and sisters in the family of God. James calls us to live lives where there's no disconnect between what we preach.

And what we practice. Lives that are not hypocritical. But are marked by an integrity that can be seen by the people who look at us.

James calls us to live lives that are not foolish. Where we pick up the Bible and we learn the truth. And then we don't live by it. But he calls us to live lives which are wise.

Where we are both listeners to and doers of the word. James calls us to a massively high standard. But who do you think James has in mind?

[31 : 47] When he sketches out for us. This picture of how we're to live. Well he has in mind Jesus. He's looking to Jesus.

And for all these years. James the brother of Jesus. Saw everything that he calls us to. Lived out. Consistently. Absolutely. Perfect. In the life of Christ. Christ. And so it's Jesus.

That he's calling us to look to. Verse 20. Remember this. Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way.

Will save him from death. And cover over a multitude of sins. Who is able to save a sinner. From the error of his way. We can express concern.

[32 : 50] But we can save no one. We can't do that kind of saving. Only Jesus can. Who is able to save a sinner from death.

Well not me. And not you. But Jesus. Who is able to cover over a multitude of sins.

Not me. Not you. Not any priest. But Jesus. So as we close this letter.

Let us turn. From sin. And let us turn. In faith. To Jesus. Our saviour.

The one who is able to. Save us from. Eternal death. The one. Whose blood is able to cover over. A multitude of our sins. Let us look.

[33 : 54] To Jesus. Let us trust. In Jesus. And let us seek. To live lives. That will show. Others. The image of Jesus.

In us. And amongst us. And may the Lord. Enable us. To do so.

Thank you.