

**Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God**

Sermon

The Epistle of James

19 November 2023

James 4:11-17

6 Who is calling the shots?

When we humble ourselves before the Lord

1. **We won't put others down** 4:11-12
2. **We won't push God aside** 4:13-17

- Have you ever woken up to someone shining a **torch** on you?
- You know what people always say in that situation... "Are you awake??"
- And the answer is always, "Well, I am **now!**" //
- James has been shining the light on **all aspects** of our lives throughout this book.
- Are you **awake**?
- How have **you survived**?
- It's been **challenging** hasn't it?? ///
- Do we see **trials** as the work of **God** to help us **grow**?
- Do we only ever **hear** God's word and never do anything **about** what we hear?
- are we looking after the **widows** and **orphans** of our **time**?
- Do we treat people who can **give** us something differently to those who can't give us **anything**?
- If you were **arrested** for being a Christian – would there be enough evidence to **convict you**?
- Have you **tamed** your **tongue**?
- Does your wisdom arise from your **reverent** awe of **God** – or are you so in awe of **yourself** that you are your **own** source of wisdom?
- And are you **flirting** with the world while claiming **friendship** with **God**?? ////
- Like being in a huge **surf** if you head to the coast for your summer holidays – getting hit by **one wave** of **challenge** after **another**...
- And you might be thinking – **enough** James! Give us a **break**!
- And he did /// last **week**. //
- With tender words of **compassion**.... as if to say – I know I've thrown a lot at you... so let me encourage you – God **gives** us more **grace**.... 4:6
- Let me **assure** you – that when you **resist** the **devil**, he **WILL flee!!**
- Let me **comfort** you – when you draw **near** to **God** – he will **draw near** to **you**.... //
- And when you **grieve** your sin and wash your **hands** and purify your **hearts**... that is – when you **humble** yourselves before the **Lord**.... // He will **lift you up!!** ////
- **ALL** of that is important context for today's passage in James 4:11-17.

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- It is the end of **last week's** passage taken a little **further**...
- So we're exploring the *implications* of **humbling ourselves** before the **Lord**.... – v10.
- What does he **mean**? And what will it look like?
- To **humble** ourselves before the **Lord** – is similar to the description of **wisdom** we've explored... is to have that **right** and **appropriate reverent awe** of **God**....
- It is to stand with **Job** of the Old Testament who at the end of that great book says:
*"I know that you can do **all things**; **no purpose of yours can be thwarted**." Job 42:1*
Or again in v3: *"Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know".*
(Job 42:3)
- The remainder of James' letter then, spells out what will **happen** when we **humble** ourselves before the **Lord**...
- And we'll see **two outcomes** this **morning** and **three** outcomes next **week**...
- This **morning**:

When we humble ourselves before the Lord

1. **We won't put others down** 4:11-12
2. **We won't push God aside** 4:13-17

- So; first:
- 1. **We won't put others down** 4:11-12
- Let's have a look at vv11-12 again - *Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.* ¹² *There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbour?*
- Remember – the context is **humility** – and that leads James to go directly to this issue of **slander**—presumably because slander arises from the very **opposite** of being humble.
- When we **slander** another person, we put them **down**.
- And often we like to put people **down** because it makes **us** feel that we've just gone a little **higher** up **ourselves**.
- If I can run you down, then I may **feel** a little better about **myself** //
- I am aware of my own shortcomings... if I can find someone **worse** than me, then I won't feel as **bad** about **myself**... rather I'll feel a little **superior** – a little **self-righteous**! //
- The word translated '**slander**' here means '**to speak against**'.
- It doesn't mean so much to talk **down** to another – but to talk another; **down**!
- That is, this sort of talk most often happens behind someone's **back**... done in a **cowardly** way where the person concerned is not around to **respond** to any **allegations**!
- It's related to **gossip** isn't it?
- It involves reports about someone else that are more often than not **false**... repeating stories about someone which are **uncollaborated**... where we pass on confidential **titbits** of **information** which can actually **destroy** the good name of those not **present** to defend **themselves**! //

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- And James says – make sure **you** don't think someone has died and made **YOU** the **judge** of the **world...** that someone has put you in **charge** of what is **right** and **wrong...**
- ...make sure – while we're on the subject of the **tongue** – which we were last week – that you're not **using your tongue** to speak against your **brothers** and **sisters**, putting them **down!**
- Furthermore, we often impute **motives** about which we're in no **position to judge!**
- We'll say – oh well the only reason **she's** helping is because.... such and such... and the only reason he's saying **that** is because of **this....**
- And James says – '**who do you think you are?**' Who are **you** to judge your **neighbour** in that way? **You** don't know the motives of people's hearts. ///
- Does this happen in your **church?**
- Has it destroyed **relationships** and **trust?**
- Are there people no longer **coming** because of this sort of thing? ///
- It is **SO** damaging and precisely the **opposite** to how we should behave as we humble ourselves before **God!** //
- This sort of behaviour has to **stop.**
- It has to stop in **obedience** to the **Word of God** and is **submission** to the **Spirit of God!** ///
- Picking up the exhortation from last week's passage – if this is behaviour which has become a pattern in your life – you need to call it **sin...** and you need to **grieve, mourn** and **wail** that **sin!** //
- And then we need to say with John Newton – "I am a **great sinner** – but **Christ** is a great **Saviour**" – and we need to **rest** in what Jesus has done on the **cross...** and go and **sin no more!** //
- One more thing to say on this... as it is often confused...
- James, in telling us not to judge..., is not calling for us to set aside our critical **faculties....** It is not as if we're **NEVER** to judge another's actions...
- This is very, very important, because we need to **protect** young people.... And all of our safe ministry protocols are designed to help us make a **judgement** call about whether a person will provide a **safe context** for **children!**
- it's not uncommon to hear people use Jesus' warning against judging as a basis for accepting behaviour which the Bible actually **condemns.** Am I right?
- So, for example, let's say we have something that is clearly set out in Scripture as being **unacceptable,** whatever it might be. And then someone says, "I noticed that Mr. X is involved in y," and someone says, "Well, 'Judge not, that you be not judged.'"
- That's not actually what James is **on about** here. He's not asking us to **muddy** the waters of **Scripture....** Or turn a **blind** eye to **sin....**
- Rather, James is talking about when we enter into **superficial, misguided, uninformed, cruel** judgments, behind people's **backs... THAT** is what he is **addressing.**
- Jesus said – by their **fruit** you will know them – inferring that there **will** indeed be a time when you make certain **judgement calls....** But it will **always** be, after you've removed the log out of your **own eye first!** //
- Let me finish this section with this quote: "The knowledge of our own failings makes us more and more hesitant about expressing any form of criticism of others. The person who knows themselves, learns an increasing silence before other people's faults." (Derek Prime)

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- That's a great quote. "The man or the woman who knows themselves, learns an increasing silence before others' faults."
 - This is not **cowardness** or **softness**, but rather it is **Christlikeness** and it is **tenderness**. //
 - For when we **humble** ourselves before **God**, we won't **put others down**. /
 - And if we humble **ourselves** before **God**:
2. **We won't push God aside** 4:13-17
- Have a look with me at v13: *Now listen, you who say 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money'*
 - These were **boom** times in the 1st century.
 - The Roman empire was **growing**
 - Travel was **easy** – thanks to the Roman roads
 - Trade was **increasing**
 - And at the time James wrote, millions of dollars was being spent by wealthy citizens on luxuries from India, China and Arabia – spices, jewellery, silk, perfume etc.
 - But James' brother had earlier said – *'So do not worry, saying, 'what shall we eat?' or 'what shall we drink' or 'what shall we wear?'. For the pagans run after all these things. Matthew 6:31-32*
 - Now – traders had been around for years – but with the increasing wealth of the time – more and more people **were running after all these things** and aspiring to and dreaming of great **wealth** as a **result**.
 - Think of **our** boom times of the past.
 - Think of people being drawn for the first time in to starting their own small business, or trading the stock market...
 - now – there's nothing wrong with an entrepreneurial spirit...
 - ...but there is **arrogance** here....
 - people were moving smugly up the social scale and waving smugly at those they passed.
 - You can hear the conversation in the market place – 'oh yes, I have a shipment of spices arriving tomorrow from Egypt. I'll be taking them down to Ephesus on Tuesday before heading to Rome for some trade negotiations there.
 - And James responds v14 – *why, you do not know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a **mist** that appears for a little while and then vanishes.*
 - James is right. The precious stock could be shipwrecked on the way from Egypt, the merchandise could be raided on the way to Ephesus, the households of Rome could find a cheaper price from another merchant.
 - Or a fire could gut your house the day before you plan to move out.
 - Or you could be killed in an ambush before you know it.
 - Who knows what will happen **tomorrow**?
 - Or this **afternoon**?
 - Our lives – even successful ones – are simply a '**mist**' appearing and disappearing without a **trace**.

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- Reminds us of James' words in Ch 1 – *the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business.*
- Now friends – we need to **hear** this don't we? //
- Because we're often **arrogant**.
- often making plans without any **reference** to **God**
- often think we're a lot more **important** than we **are**.
- And we can all boast about our **life** or **plans** or **deals** or... whatever... in other words we often think we're in control of our **money**, our **holidays**, our **portfolios**... our **property**... we can be very **presumptuous**... and pretty **independent** of **God**... //
- James isn't saying 'don't make **plans**'.
- He's not saying 'don't **trade**'
- He **IS** saying – do everything under the **banner** – the **umbrella** of – or with the **mindset** of – '**if the Lord will**'.
- In **humility** we need to acknowledge the **supremacy** of God in all of **life**.
- **He rules**.
- *If the Lord will, we will do this or that.*
- I think Christians around 2 -3 decades ago used to live more consciously like that...
- 'see you Sunday – God willing'
- 'I'm going overseas in June – God willing'
- 'I'm off to see the family in Melbourne on Friday – God willing'.
- 'See you down by the river for the picnic – God willing'
- I remember my parents and their friends and other people at church talking like that.
- "D.V. & W.P" – they used to say.... a combination of "Deo volente" – God willing - and "weather permitting."
- Of course, the mere adding of words doesn't change things... we need a change of **heart** here...
- We need to live knowing **we're** not in **charge**.
- We need to bring our **plans** to **God**
- We need to **humble** ourselves before God - **submit** ourselves to him.
- We need to know that he **rules**... he **reigns**... we need to live like we **believe** that line we pray every **week** – '**your** will be **done**'!! ///
- And remember the last line of this section...?
- v17 *anyone who knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, sins*!
- – that is – we now **know** that we need to surrender to the sovereign will of God in our lives... **that** is the good we **ought** to **do**... and we if **don't** live this way – James says, we **sin**! ///
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- I long that every member of our church right across the diocese... including me... would take pause today to humble ourselves before God...

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- Can we stand with Job and say? *“I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted.”*
- Stand before our great God with reverent awe. ///
- For if we **humble ourselves** before the Lord, **he will lift us up!**

- If we **humble ourselves** before the Lord; we won't put others **down** – won't **slander** them behind their **back**, considering ourselves as so **wonderfully superior...**
- If we **humble** ourselves before the Lord, we won't push **God aside...!**
- And **every** plan we **make** – every **step** we **take** – every **choice** – every **decision...** every **prayer....** will **always...** be.... after the **pattern** of the **Lord Jesus....**with the clear **understanding** of “yet not **my** will, but **yours** be **done...**”