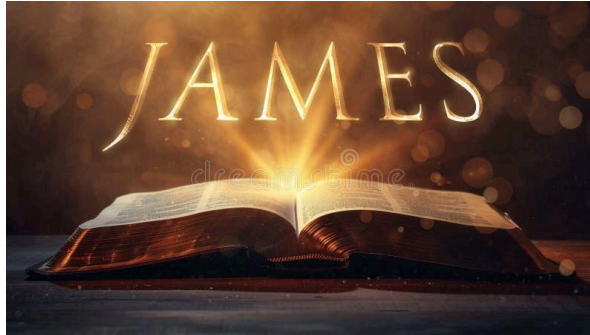


Abbey Baptist Church, Reading

WORSHIP SERVICE 10.30 A.M. JUNE 15TH 2025

Leading: Bridget Gurney Preaching: Simon Bird

www.abbeybaptistchurch.org.uk. Facebook @ Abbey Baptist Church, Reading



Prepare with prayer

Amazing Grace – BPW 550

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear,
the hour I first believed!

My rebel soul, that once withstood
the Saviour's kindest call,
rejoices now, by grace subdued,
to serve him with its all.

Through many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.

What thanks I owe you, and what love-
a boundless, endless store
shall echo through the realms above
when time shall be no more.

JOHN NEWTON (1725-1807) v.5 WILLIAM COWPER (1731-1800) based on Ephesians 2: 4-8 / CCL Licence Number: 1763

Family time

One more step along the world I go - BPW 356

Gifts for the Lord collected during the singing of the song, and children leave during the last verse for their groups.

One more step along the world I go,
one more step along the world I go,
from the old things to the new
keep me travelling along with you:

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

Round the corners of the world I turn,
more and more about the world I learn,
all the new things that I see
you'll be looking at along with me:

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

As I travel through the bad and good,
keep me travelling the way I should;
where I see no way to go
you'll be telling me the way, I know:

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

Give me courage when the world is rough,
keep me loving though the world is tough;
leap and sing in all I do,
keep me travelling along with you:

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

You are older than the world can be,
you are younger than the life in me;
ever old and ever new,
keep me travelling along with you.

And it's from the old I travel to the new;
keep me travelling along with you.

SYDNEY CARTER (b. 1915) /Stainer & Bell Ltd. / CCL Licence Number: 1763

Prayers of Praise, Confession and Thanksgiving

Father in Heaven, you are all powerful, merciful and mighty.
You are full of compassion and care for each one of us here.
You love to hear us lifting our voices in praise to you.

We praise you, Lord.

Father, we know deep down that each one of us has made mistakes, even in the last few hours.
Our thoughts are not always your thoughts, our actions are not always pleasing to you, and our speech is often thoughtless and unworthy of you.

Father, we are sorry; forgive us, we pray.

We do thank you for your forgiveness.
We thank you for all you have provided for us, our homes, our clothing, our food.
We thank you for nature in all its beauty.

We give you all our thanks. Amen.

Father in heaven – BPW590

Father in heaven,
be your name hallowed;
bring in your kingdom,
reign here in love;
help us to give you
joyful obedience,
as they obey you
in heaven above.

Give to us daily
food for our bodies;
grant us forgiveness
as we forgive;
you know our weakness,
spare us the testing,
save us from evil
each day we live.

Yours is the kingdom,
Father eternal;
yours is the power,
maker of men;
worship we offer,
praises we bring you,
yours is the glory
for ever. Amen.

STELLA READ from the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6: 9-13) / © S. Read / CCL Licence Number: 1763

First Bible Reading: Micah 6:6-8

Second Bible Reading: James 1:1 and 1:18-27

Sermon

Do you have a favourite or memorable verse from James? The book of James is full of memorable, almost shocking, word pictures.

My memorable verse is, 'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.' (1:22). This sums up James: practical wisdom and obedience; and living the Christian life, rather than just talking about it. Let us make a declaration: **'We will listen to God's word and do what it says.'**

We are starting a series on the book of James. My aim this morning is to give you an overview, to whet your appetite to read James for yourself, and help you not get lost and give up! So, here are some thoughts to help you start your journey through James.

It is helpful to know that people do find James difficult to follow. It has abrupt changes of subject and cycles around these subjects - it does not have the logical flow of Paul's letters. Some say it has no structure, it is just wise sayings, like the book of Proverbs. Maybe it is like pearls – we speak of pearls of wisdom – each beautiful and to be admired. But there are different ways of arranging James, like pearls along a beautiful necklace, and these are helpful when reading. But as you read, you may find you miss the connections. My best advice is not to worry if you lose the thread; keep reading and praying.

The simplest structure of the letter I have seen is that Chapter 1 is an introduction cycling around several themes: patience in suffering, prayer, spiritual birth and spiritual growth. Chapter 1:26-27 states three topics: the tongue, care for the needy and personal holiness, which are developed in Chapters 2-4. Chapter 5:7-20 is a conclusion, restating the need for patience in suffering, prayer and care for the needy.

One thing to remember when reading scripture is not just to study with our minds, but let it speak to our hearts. As we read it prayerfully, chewing over verses, the Holy Spirit may whisper to us. So listen out for this when you first read.

The first verse reads, 'James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings.'

The most straight-forward understanding is that the James who wrote this letter is the half-brother of Jesus. He did not believe in Jesus during his life, but Jesus appeared to him after his resurrection. Then he became the leader (and the pillar) of the church in Jerusalem. (1 Corinthians 15:7, Gal 1:19, 2:9 and Acts 12:17). For me that gives this letter the authority of the early senior leader of the church, and it

breathes with the practical approach to life we would expect from Jesus. James was known for his prayer life and was martyred by the Jews in about 62AD.

It is sent 'to the twelve tribes.' This could mean to all the people of God, i.e. to all Christians then, but the content of the letter seems to relate to Jews, e.g. it speaks of the synagogue. But these Jews have become Christians. It says they have been born again and are believers in the glorious Lord Jesus Christ (1:18, 2:1). But this does not mean that we Gentiles can ignore James.

The background of the letter is that the Jewish believing community were mainly poor and faced oppression by the rich. This fits with the famine we hear about in Acts (11:28). So the trials mentioned in the letter could come from these economic pressures, but also pressure from the political instability and persecution before the Jewish revolt in AD66. Some Jews may have been of the Zealot party, wanting to fight back at this time, hence some of James comments about wisdom and peace. All this helps understand the letter. We may not be in the same situation, but we still have trials and pressures of our own, and James will help us bear these.

Now I want to remove a few things that we might trip over. When I read, I cannot get past chapter 1:6, 'when you ask, you must believe and not doubt... that person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord.' I immediately disqualify myself with what seems to be a 'Catch 22' - an impossible conundrum. I know I need God's help, but unless I am strong in faith, I won't get this help. Trapped. It cannot mean this because, later in the letter, it refers to Abraham's faith, and we know that Abraham had his ups and downs, doubts and fears. What it seems to mean is, not that those who have intellectual doubts will be disqualified (we all have these). Rather, it means those not basically committed to the Lord will not receive from the Lord. But, if you search your heart and know you are basically committed to the Lord, then you can expect him to answer your prayers.

We all know that Paul says we are justified by faith alone (Rom 3:28) while James says, 'a person is justified by works and not by faith alone' (2:24). Does the bible contradict itself? Very briefly, no! Justified means something different in each case. Paul means that when we are saved, we are counted as being righteous before God, which we do not deserve. James means the righteousness of our behaviour. We do not rely on works (the things we do) to be saved, but we show we are saved by good works, and Paul agrees with that (Eph 2:8-10).

The other thing is the place of the law, which is the law of Moses in the Old Testament which Jews follow. Paul calls it slavery (Gal 5:1), while James says it brings freedom (1:25, 2:12). The difference is that Paul is talking about the Jewish Christians continuing to keep Moses' law, as Jews would. However, Jesus came to fulfil the law, not abolish it (Matt 5:17). Jesus summarised the law in two great commandments (Matt 22:37-40). Also, in the new covenant, God writes his law on our hearts (Jer 31:31-34). So if we love God and love our neighbour - as James says, follow the Royal Law of love (Jas 2:8) - and follow the Spirit's leading (Gal 5:23, Rom 8:4) we will be led to keep the law's standards of behaviour. We do not follow the ceremonial and sacrificial part of Moses' law. But if we are motivated by love and care for one another, we will naturally keep the heart of God's law. We will be Kingdom people: support Fair Trade, work for justice, care for the poor and needy and tell people how to be saved. All very practical.

So I hope this morning I have whetted your appetite, and the first outcome of this sermon is that you will go away and read James for yourself. Let it speak to you, puzzle over and pray yourself about the things you do not understand and see how God will guide you. Be sure to do what it says!

Song MP 66 Broken for me

Broken for me, broken for you,

The body of Jesus broken for you.

He offered his body, he poured out his soul;

Jesus was broken, that we might be whole.

Broken for me, broken for you,

The body of Jesus broken for you.

Come to my table and with me dine;

Eat of my bread and drink of my wine.

Broken for me, broken for you,
The body of Jesus broken for you.
This is my body given for you;
Eat it remembering I died for you.
Broken for me, broken for you,
The body of Jesus broken for you.
This is my blood I shed for you.
For your forgiveness, making you new.
Broken for me, broken for you,
The body of Jesus broken for you.

Janet Lunt

Communion

Intercessory Prayer

In Christ alone - MP 1072

In Christ alone my hope is found,
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My Comforter, my All in All,
Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone! - who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless babe.
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save:
Till on that cross as Jesus died,
The wrath of God was satisfied -
For every sin on Him was laid;
Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain:
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,
For I am His and He is mine -
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death,
This is the power of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No power of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand:
Till He returns or calls me home,
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand.

Stuart Townend and Keith Getty – Thank You Music

The Blessing:

As you go through the week, may the Lord ever be close to you.
May he uphold you, and keep you safe in his care. Amen.

The Grace: May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

This week's notices

Wednesday 18th 10.30am Renew Wellbeing

Thursday 19th 10.30am Toddlers

Friday 20th 5.00pm Table Tennis Club

6.30 – 9.30pm Want to know more about Islam and how to chat with Muslims?
Speaker: Mike Jones - Frontiers – www.frontiers.org.uk