

Whoever you are wherever you are

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Sermon Audio file

NO RESTRICTIONS... whoever you are, wherever you are

Welcome - "No Restrictions!" That's what we are all waiting for and hoping for, but at the same time are no doubt wary of... despite the variant and Covid cases rising around the country it seems that 19th July could still be seen as D-Day. No restrictions... sounds attractive! THAT is what we are calling our forthcoming teaching series as we take a look at the book of James. So... does this book of the bible REALLY say there are no restrictions...?! Yes and no lol! No... that anything goes!

So what do we mean then? Quite simply... there are NO restrictions... to putting our faith into practise... and that's what James is eager to encourage... before we take a look further, we are going to worship God and sing His praise!

Song - Here I am to worship

Song - O Jesus I have promised - verse 1 and 5 only

Why are we looking at this letter? Who wrote it? Who is it for? What does this mean for us?

Intro - We are looking at the book of James as this is God's Word to us, second because it seemed appropriate, having looked at something in the Old Testament the last couple months it'd be good to do something from the New Testament, and thirdly because it seemed that such a book was well timed for us as a Church. It's punchy and very direct, and at a time when many of us can become comfortable with 'dressing gown and Church at home' Christianity this might help us to refocus on what we are about and how we should be living!

James does not deal with the essence of salvation. There's nothing about the crucifixion or resurrection of Jesus, things aren't mentioned because they are assumed. He is writing to Christians - that's us lot.

Some see James as almost a commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. His goal is the same as that of Jesus, to convince his audience that their professed faith will not benefit them if they say one thing but do another.

"If we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie and do not the truth" (1 John 1: 6).
1 Cor 11: 28, "Let a man examine himself." Haggai 1: 5, "Here's the Word of God...`Consider your ways."

We will have to do that...

Why? Because James doesn't mince his words. His sentences are short, forceful, direct, prophetic in tone, and authoritative. James is black and white about application, his material hits like arrows to the target.

Matt Hancock would certainly not like this book as there are no room for grey areas.

There are indeed NO RESTRICTIONS... according to James... to putting your faith into practice.

Reading - Glynn - James 1: 1, then 3: 13-18

Who wrote it...? James - but which one? Depending on our age we could all come up with a different answer as to who was the real James Bond...?

To date, seven actors in total have portrayed Bond in film. Following Sean Connery's long run portrayal, it was David Niven, George Lazenby, Roger Moore, Timothy Dalton, Pierce Brosnan and Daniel Craig.

In the same way as we debate who was the real James Bond, so we can debate here who was this James? Here we have a choice of at least 4. It helps for us to know because it gives us an insight into what was happening at the time.

There is James the son of Alphaeus (Matt 10), named wherever you see a list of disciples. All we know about him is that he 'may' have been the brother of Matthew. Mark 2: 14, "Matthew who's also known as Levi, was the son of Alphaeus." If it's the same Alphaeus then James and Matthew were indeed brothers.

There is James the father of Judas (Luke 6: 16) not Iscariot, the other apostle named Judas. He's a very obscure James and there's no reason to credit him with writing this epistle either. We know nothing about him.

The third James, and the one perhaps most familiar, is James the son of Zebedee and the older brother of the Apostle John. James and John were volatile men, originally labelled "the sons of thunder".

James was one of the Twelve, one of the inner three of Peter, James and John. He was called by our Lord from fishing and was the first 'Apostle' to be martyred (Acts 12: 2). In the NT he never appears alone, without his brother John, except in his martyrdom. Since he lost his head by Acts 12, it would be impossible for him to have written this epistle. He would have been in glory by this time.

Finally we have James the brother of Jesus (Gal 1: 19). After the birth of Jesus, Mary went on with her husband Joseph to bear children, male and female (Matt 13: 55), and one of those, most likely the next oldest son, was named James. He would have played with Jesus as a boy, looked up to him as older brother, wondered why Jesus never got told off, maybe despised him, and he certainly did not initially believe in

Jesus as being God's Son (John 7: 5).

We don't know when that changed but we do know that after Jesus came back to life he appeared to James, "After that He was seen by James, then all the apostles" (1 Cor 15: 7). James is then there with the other believers in the Upper room (Acts 1: 14), waiting for Pentecost. When Peter is released miraculously from prison he told those who had been praying, "Tell James and the brothers..." (Acts 12: 17), then at the Council of Jerusalem in about AD 50, when the Church faces a serious issue, it is James who presides and shows leadership, "Brothers, listen to me..." (Acts 15: 13). Towards the end of Acts, when Paul arrived at Jerusalem, we read that they "went to see James and all the Elders were present" (21: 18). Paul calls James a pillar of the Church (Gal 2: 9) so it seems likely that it was this James who penned this letter.

"James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations: Greetings."

What is James saying ? "I am a slave of God" Yes. And: "I am a slave of Jesus Christ too." He puts Jesus alongside God. What a declaration to the deity of Jesus, as confessed by his younger (half) brother. "I serve them equally," says James.

Our translation is not the best. It can be translated like this, "a servant of Jesus Christ who is God and Lord." Literally it is, "James of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ a slave". This is how James viewed Jesus.

Who is it for?

"To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." What does this mean? The letter is written to Christians. It is not a Jewish letter. James is telling these Christians that they actually are "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations." They all knew about their patriarch Jacob having 12 sons and their living for 400 years in Egypt by the end of which they were a mighty people. Israel. They were divided into 12 tribes

each bearing a name of one of Jacob's sons. They were brought into the land of Canaan and settled into it in geographical tribal units. Over the centuries, God's people scattered. Now, James is saying, Christians are the real twelve tribes; they are Israel, God's people. Paul calls Christians "the Israel of God."

So these believers in the Lord Jesus would get this letter and would say two things:-

1. "Oh ! So we are now the twelve tribes. That's a high calling. God is now saying specifically to us, "We are the heirs of the covenants and the promises. We'd better not behave as inconsistently as they did."

2. But they are the twelve tribes 'scattered'. Scattering spoke of persecution, danger, pressures, invasion, attack and battles. Such actions have indeed scattered them (Acts 8). Scattering is good for the Gospel.

What James was also doing was opening up the Scriptures to them, helping them to see the Old Testament was to give them hope because they are now the true scattered dispersed Israel. But this title "the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" would be particularly striking to Christians who had been converted from being Jews. The majority of the first believers had been Jewish. So were the readers of this letter.

James seems to have been the 'Senior Pastor' in Jerusalem and the Church would have been overwhelmingly Jewish. There had been an outbreak of savage persecution: non-Christian Jews were stoning Jewish Christians to death. Acts 8: 1 reads, "On the day Stephen was killed a great persecution broke out against the Church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria." Jewish Christians suffered a double blow, persecuted as being Christians by other religionists and by Nero, but also persecuted by their fellow-countrymen as being heretics. So we can see why the letter begins with advice about handling such trials.

The fact that the persecution in Acts 8 occurred in about AD 35-37 => James' letter must have been after this. The Jewish historian Josephus recorded that James was condemned and stoned in AD 62, so his letter must have also been written before this. It seems likely to imagine the letter being penned about AD 40 => it was probably one of the first books of the NT. Key discipleship tool in 'Christian' living. No restrictions!!

These Jewish Christians carried with them the total background and baggage of their religion. We are told about Grecian Jews and Hebraic Jews in the Church (Acts 6), a large number of priests becoming Christians, some of the Pharisees believed. One of Jesus' apostles was Simon a converted Jewish Zealot, while another, Matthew, came from the other end of the political spectrum and was a converted Jewish tax- collector working for the Romans. All of these Jews brought a lot of prejudice and misconceptions into the kingdom of God with them. So we are not to think of this group of Jewish Christians as one tidy group.

On Paul's last visit to Jerusalem he was told by James and the Elders of the Church in Acts 21: 20 "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law..."

That is the picture we have to bear in mind when we read this letter, people converted out of Judaism and facing persecution. James wants this first generation of Christians to live right, and the issues he hits head-on are still very relevant for us - as we shall see! But they certainly weren't a 'one size fits all' kind

of Church.

In the same way we aren't a tidy bunch here at DCC. We have some who were a part of the Church years ago when there was more of a Brethren feel to the Church. Others have had an experience of renewal or come from a more charismatic background. We have some who would hear these labels and simply not know what any of them really mean! Others have had an Anglican background. Others have no Church background at all. So if you want to know what the average Church member is like... there isn't one!

Diversity can be a challenge but it can also be a huge positive if embraced. Take the issue of how we worship God. Some like older songs, some like newer songs. Some like the organ, some like a band. Some like songs to be interspersed throughout the service, some like what's often called a 'block' of worship. I have no problem with anyone's preferred style. What we mustn't do is seek to make a theology out of our

preference. Let's respect one another, encourage one another to worship God in whatever way THEY feel comfortable and, above all, to remember that worship is actually for... God - not to make us 'feel good'!

Song - Lord you have my heart OR It is well

What does it mean for us?

Martin Luther, the incredible Christian reformer, suggested that James's letter was a second-class Scripture rather than affirming its right to be in the Bible as much as the Sermon on the Mount.

Other scholars have dismissed it as a Jewish piece of writing with superficial Christian editing. Others have described it as having "the morality of a working class gathering, marked by resentment against the rich, suspicion of the world and a narrow Christianity lacking in Paul's missionary vision."

Some people have said, "Well, James is in conflict with Paul." Not at all. To Paul the question was this, "How is salvation received?" In the book of Romans Paul was asking and answering that question, "How is salvation received?" And Paul's answer was always "by faith alone." But to James the question is, "How is salvation proven?" And his answer always is, "By works alone." It is received by faith, it is proven by works. There's no conflict, rather, there's perfect harmony.

Dr. J. Gresham Machen, "It does not lay the foundation of Christian faith. But it shows how, upon that foundation, may be built not the wood, hay and stubble of a wordy orthodoxy, but the gold and silver and precious stones of an honest Christian life."

Contrary to what some might say, James also gives us theology - of suffering, of sin, of temptation, fallenness, of demonic evil, and of Christ. He uses the word "kurios" eleven times, Jesus is Lord to James, the One who is the source of wisdom in chapter 1, the One before whom all men are humbled in chapter 4, the One who is the healer in chapter 5. He explains God to us. He uses the name "God," "theos," seventeen times.

He says of himself, "A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ." "Doulos" is the word "servant," William Barclay says a "doulos" was characterized by absolute obedience, absolute humility, absolute loyalty and pride, in a good sense. James was proud to be but a servant.

Yet to others he was a key leader in the life and growth of the Christian Church. To us as a people of God, also servants of Jesus, he has left both a legacy and a challenge - for faith without actions is dead.

From what we now know of the man and his mission, we're going to be looking at enduring tough times, our status and identity, treating people how we'd like to be treated, being wise with how we use our tongue, keeping the peace, owning our own peace, being in the world but not of the world, the difference between living for now and living for eternity, coping with suffering, the place of patience, prayer from

healing,

and turning to God on all occasions... there are no restrictions... on putting our faith into practise, so let's encourage that all the more of one another over the next 3 months!

Song - He will hold me fast

Song - Goodness of God

Prayers by Robin & Jill Rowles

Community Kids - Laura King

Celebrations