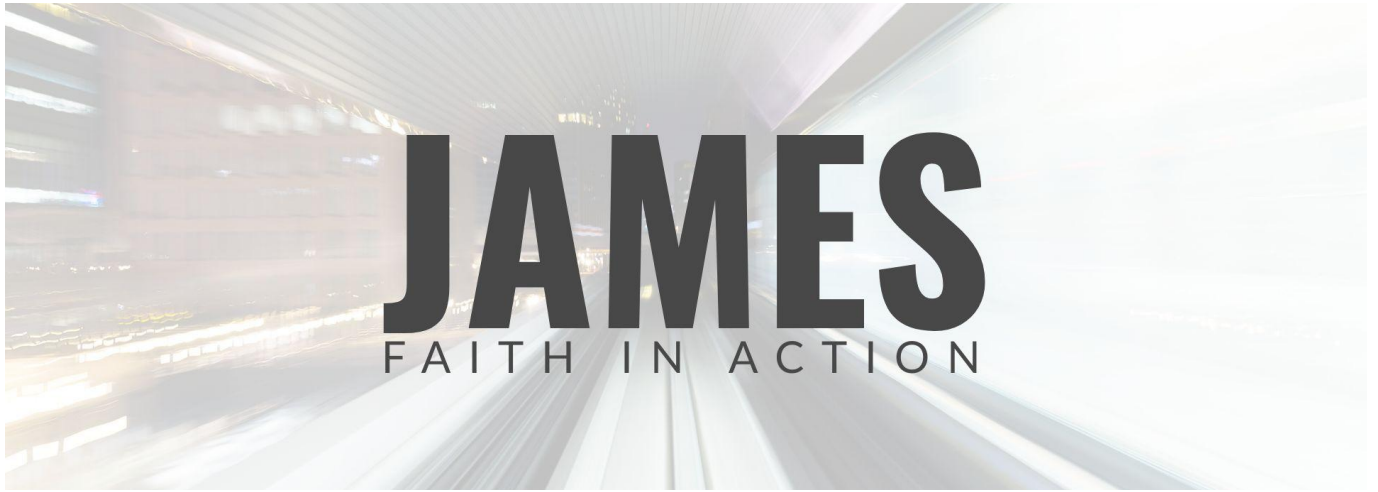




JAMES - Faith in Action

Real Faith Speaks (6/9)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONNECT: If real faith always shows itself in action, what's one way you want to live out your faith more clearly this week?

Warm-Up

1. When you think about the power of words, what's one time they had a big impact on you (either positively or negatively)?

Read James 3:1-12

2. What do you think of this passage? Any initial thoughts, reactions, or questions that arise for you?
3. How do the images of a horse's bit and a ship's rudder (vv.3-4) help us understand the influence of our words?
4. How have you seen small words make a big difference in someone's life?
5. In verses 5-6, James describes the tongue as a fire. What do you think he means by this?
6. How does James describe the hypocrisy of using the same tongue to praise God and curse people (vv.9-10)?
7. Why does James warn that not many should become teachers (v.1)?
8. James says "no human being can tame the tongue" (v.8). What does this tell us about our need for humility and God's Spirit?

Read James 3:13-18

9. What do you think of this passage? Any initial thoughts, reactions, or questions that arise for you?
10. According to verse 13, how should true wisdom show itself?
11. What does James say about jealousy and selfish ambition (vv.14-16)? Why are these so destructive in the church?
12. Can you think of situations where ambition or pride caused conflict or hurt in Christian community?
13. How does James describe the wisdom that comes from above (v.17)? Which of these qualities stand out to you?
14. Verse 18 speaks of a "harvest of righteousness sown in peace." What might this look like in your life, friendships, or church?
15. Looking back over the passage, where do you see Jesus' example of humble speech and wisdom? How can following him help us grow in these areas?

APPLY: After looking at James 3, what's one way you want to let God shape your words or your wisdom this week?

PRAY: *Heavenly Father, thank you for your wisdom that is pure, peaceable, and full of mercy. Forgive us for words that harm and hearts full of pride. By your Spirit, help us to speak with humility and live with wisdom that reflects Jesus, our gentle and humble Saviour. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

TITLE: Real Faith - Speaks

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: The Christian's life and tongue is to be marked by humble wisdom

STRUCTURE:

- 3:1-12 - Humble Speech
- 3:13-18 - Humble Wisdom

- There was once a minister who was told by one of his congregation members that he was the most humble person they knew.
- He then replied with "Finally - something I can be proud of!"
- James has been laying out in completely clear terms that the person who claims to have faith - must also live a life that is consistent with that claim.
- He's spoken about obedience, temptation, doing the word, not showing favouritism, and the fact that faith without works is useless!
- And now - James comes to speaking about leaders, the tongue, and wisdom.
- It may have been the case in the first century that people were aspiring to be leaders in the church, to try and gain some prestige and make a name for themselves!
- But James makes it so abundantly clear that God's church and the leadership and the people in the church are to live in humble wisdom.
- Wisdom that's not like the world - but Godly wisdom.
- In their speech and in how they live - humble, godly wisdom is to flow through it all.

- **Humble Speech**
- James has mentioned the tongue and speech before.
- In 1:19 James urges us to be slow to speak and quick to hear
- And now in James 3 he goes on to explain why!
- And the reason why we ought to be slow to speak is because our tongues can be so hard to get control over!
- 3:1 "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. For we all stumble in many ways. And if anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body."
- Now we'll come back to the part about teachers soon, but for now...
- James says if there is a man who does not stumble in words, or can actually control his tongue and his mouth and actually uses his speech always for good...he is probably perfect!
- And able to control every part of his body!
- If you're able to control your speech - and let's also add in your blogging on social media or commenting or emails - you're probably perfect!
- Why?
- Because the tongue is so hard to control.
 - *It kind of brings to mind a hose that is turned onto the maximum, snaking it's way out of control - shooting water everywhere!!*
 - *That's what James describes the tongue like!*

- And not only is it hard to control - it's also powerful!
- The power of the tongue for good or for evil is completely out of proportion to its size!
- James uses two illustrations to demonstrate this.
- One of a horse!
 - A strong beast - a thoroughbred - an animal that could be dangerous if out of control
 - Can actually be controlled - by a small bit in their mouth.
 - These are a small bit of rope, leather - or metal that sits in the back of the horses mouth - that allows the rider to communicate to the horse where they want it to go
 - Just think - about a 10cm length of material is able to control a beast that's huge!
 - The power of this thing is totally out of proportion to its size!

- The other a ship and it's rudder
 - Once again a simple small piece of seemingly insignificant wood or now metal can control and steer a HUGE ship
 - The power of this thing is totally out of proportion to its size!
- Similarly - the power of the tongue to harm or to do good is completely out of proportion to its size.
- Before we get onto the negative - Do you know how much force our tongues and speech can be used for good??
- We saw this a few months ago in our brief look at a few passages in Proverbs.
- Our speech can be a fountain of life to someone!
- A word of encouragement to someone, a word of thanks - uplifting words, can have a dramatically disproportionate effect on someone compared to how insignificant they may seem.
- Or other words of asking people how they are going and actively listening to them - that can have a great impact on someone.
- Speaking God's word to other people and into their lives and situations..
- Our words can be used for so much good.

- But on the other hand...Let's look from V5
 - "5 So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, 8 but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."
- See how much damage the tongue can do!
- How much damage a small little organ can cause.
 - Fire! A World of fire, a world of unrighteousness!!
 - Terrible damage!
- Now - we need to remember that James here is writing an exhortation - a sermon! So of course he's using metaphor and dramatic language.
- But he uses it to illustrate just how powerful our words can be!
 - *You know that old saying "sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me"*
 - *What a load of rubbish that is.*
 - *Our words have the power to bring people completely down. To cause immense harm.*
 - *Lies, gaslighting, Sexism, racism, discrimination, ageism - all types of things - can cause damage.*
 - *I wonder - have you ever been on the receiving end of any of these things?*
 - *Have you felt the hurtfulness of words? Of another's tongue?*
 - *On the flipside - If you're anything like me - you can remember times when we have let our own tongues fly rampant out of an emotional outburst.*
 - *Before we know it, these seemingly small words set in motion a forest fire of hurt.*
- And that's why James writes that 'No human being can tame the tongue'
- It's a powerful force!

- He sets out the reality that with our tongues we praise God - some even preach sermons! And with that same tongue, we curse those who are made in God's own image.
- That's the reality. We can and will probably always be struggling with this!
- But hear again from V10 - "My Brothers, these things ought not to be so"
- This hypocrisy, this double mindedness, ought not to be so! Cut it out!

- But James isn't saying that we're just helpless victims to this tongue - because there is one person who can help us control our tongues by his Holy Spirit - God.
- And the way that we can let God do his work can only be through humility.

- Just as a side note - why did James mention teachers in V1?
- Well - those of us who are in teaching roles in the church, use our words a lot!! Believe me - I can go on!!
- And so I think the warning that we will be judged with greater strictness is completely appropriate given the context of what he says about words and tongues.
- Teachers - watch your tongue, and watch your life and doctrine closely, because we will be judged with greater strictness on that last day
- And those who want to head into a teaching ministry - seriously consider the privilege and responsibility that it comes with.
- But for teachers and others - the solution is actually the same.
- The way to live a consistent life no matter what role you have - is through humility.
- **Humble Wisdom**
- *I distinctly remember preaching my first ever sermon at Noosa Anglican at the ripe old age of 18*
- *I was preaching on 1 John 2 - and let's just say, it wasn't pretty...*
- *I'm pretty sure I managed to get some greek words in the script that I copied from a commentary to prove my "wisdom"*
- *And in the congregation was an unsuspecting older bloke called Bruce Winter.*
- *And he came up to me after the service and said how much he loved it and was full of encouragement to keep it up!*
- *I didn't think much of it until I went to bible college - and came across this name, Bruce Winter - again and again.*
- *Turns out that Bruce was the warden of Tyndale House at the University of Cambridge (1987–2006) - a leading prestigious bible college; was the principal of the Queensland Theological College until 2011 - practically turning the college around - and I'm pretty sure he was involved in the translation of the ESV bible that we have in our church here today.*
- *And there I was a big-headed 18 year old - quoting to him from the original greek!*
- But Bruce didn't correct, complain, nor grumble - but encouraged!
- That's humility! That's wisdom! Gentle. I've experienced so much of this here at St John's - praise God!
- *On the flip side I remember preaching in another church - and I noticed another bloke sitting in the corner, arms crossed, not engaging at all. And in-between the two services, he came up to me and said that the best part of the service was the Bach piece that the pianist was playing during communion.*
- That was a tad deflating! That wasn't particularly humble or peaceable of the bloke!
- You see - Humility is the key to gaining wisdom, and not only that but is the key to growing more like Christ.
 - If someone isn't humble - then they don't think they need correction. Then they won't be open to God's work in their life!
- Humility is the key to being able to control the tongue!
- V13 "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom."
- If you are wise - let it show - display off this in meekness, gentleness, or humility.
 - Notice - that having lots of wisdom never leads to being puffed up...it always leads to humility.
- Wisdom always leads to humility and gentleness - and the way to be wise, you first need humility!
- But the flip side of this - is greed and jealousy and selfish ambition:
- V14 "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice."
- Notice that repetition here - jealousy and selfish ambition...pride essentially!

- And see how James describes this: earthly, unspiritual, demonic!
- Anything that has a slight hint of one-upmanship, of wanting popularity for oneself, of making a name for oneself - that's not just 'not good'...that's not just 'oh that's Dave being Dave again..'....that's actually **demonic**. Evil!
- In God's church, there is to be none of this! In leadership in God's church, there is to be none of this. As we serve in God's church, there is to be no:
 - Jealousy: Craving what others have and wanting it; OR
 - Selfish ambition: Wanting to make a name for ourselves.
 - These are **demonic**.
 - James describes this as wisdom from the earth
- That's why not many people ought to become leaders as well - because sadly, churches have been used for people to make a name for themselves!
- Churches have been torn apart by greedy leaders who want to make a name for themselves
 - Leaders who instead of serving the people - use them as tools in the making of their own name.
 - OR Leaders who instead seek to glorify God only seek to glorify themselves!
 - *A good rule of thumb is that if a leader names the ministry that they lead after themselves - run away from it!*
- And then when people and leaders have this selfish-ambition - V16 - there's disorder and every vile practice.
 - Bullying, lies, deception, fleeing from accountability, insecurity, lashing out at people - not taming the tongue but letting it fly
 - All that comes when people are full of pride and are hungry for glory
 - And then as a result of this pride and vileness and selfish ambition - people start to question their own faith and walk away from it because of the pride of the leader OR of other church members!
- If you have been on the receiving end of this type of ministry, and have been hurt by it - I'm sorry.
- It's not meant to be that way!
 - *Also - if you see this creep into my leadership here at St John's - please come and talk to me so that I can have the opportunity to repent!*
- This is what tears churches apart - people's own pride and selfish ambition.
- James will go on to write in 4:1 that what causes all the quarrels is the passions and pride within the church!
- But the opposite and what the church ought to be - is so beautiful.
 - 17 "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."
- Imagine a church where everyone was pure - that is - following Jesus with everything and their whole heart...and then this purity leads to being...peaceable, gentle, impartial, sincere, full of good fruits, encouraging and humble...able to control their tongue!
- Imagine A church where no one was concerned about showmanship or making a name for themselves..But is concerned more about the needs of others..
- A church that isn't for the glory of itself, but lives purely for the Glory of God
- That description sounds pretty good doesn't it?
- I'd like to join that church!
- This is the type of church that puts on the wisdom from above and takes on the very character of Jesus.
- He describes himself like this:
- Matt 11:29-30 "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."

- This is the type of church that I'd love us here at St John's to continue to become!
- I think that we're doing well - but as we grow as a church and seek to reach out to our community - we ought to continue to be shaped by this wisdom from above.
- We ought to continue to grow in our humility.
- And we can only do this by lifting our eyes and hearts and minds continually on our gentle and lowly saviour Jesus Christ - who is tender and kind. Merciful and just.
- He humbled himself to become not a bold and ambitious leader - but to become the servant of all.
- He even was humbled to death on a cross for us! To win the victory over sin and earthly wisdom - and to bring us into relationship with him!
 - He died and rose again to give us Peace with God in order to live lives of peace and humility
- He has given us his Spirit to help us become more like him!
- And until he comes again to make all things new - we are to live lives that are shaped by:
 - Humble Speech; and
 - Humble Wisdom.