

James Part 14 – Study Notes

Introduction

Has anyone watched Bondi Rescue? It is located on Bondi beach in Australia and shows lifeguards saving people from drowning in the sea. The lifeguards use these special surfboards to get to the people in trouble and then pull them up onto the board. They don't usually swim out to them and rescue them in the water, unless there is no other option. Lifeguards know that when they rescue people from drowning the very people they are trying to help tend to fight the rescuers in panic and will even try to pull the rescuers under the water. Reason should tell them that if the lifeguard goes under as well, so does any hope of their survival. But when a person is drowning, they don't think reasonably.

Professor Howard Hendricks of Dallas Seminary told a story of a young man, who after straying from the Lord, was finally brought back to the Lord by the help of a friend who loved him **unconditionally**. Howard Hendricks asked him what it felt like when he was straying from the Lord.

The man answered, *it seemed like I was being pulled farther and farther out to sea, into deep water. And all my friends were standing on the shoreline hurling accusations at me about condemnation and sin. But there was one Christian Brother who actually swam out to get me and wouldn't let me go. I fought him, but he withstood my fighting. He grasped me, put a life jacket around me, and managed to pull me to shore. By the grace of God he was the single reason I was restored – the man refused to let me go.*

James doesn't want us to let go of anyone either. Throughout his letter he stressed the need for a faith that works, authentic faith. In the climatic conclusion James instructed how to actually deal with those who **believe like they should, but behave like they shouldn't**.

If we see someone sinking deeper into sin, we shouldn't be passive and sit back and watch. Yes we can pray for them, and we should pray for them but genuine faith calls for more than just prayer. Faith in action is essential.

James 5:19 *My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring that person back;* we must not sit back and criticise or judge someone. We should be part of the solution for them not make it worse. It is important that we take hold of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 7:3-5 *Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? ⁴How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.* Sometimes people feel it is their duty to point out minor flaws in peoples lives when in fact the truth is they have some pretty big ones themselves. Jesus condemns this kind of hypocritical judgement. Jesus says we need to do something about the plank in our own eyes first before we point out other's faults.

James spoke out about criticizing and judging brother and sisters in James 4:11-12 *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. ¹²There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you, who are you to judge your neighbor?*

In light of these warnings we should not rush into spiritual eye surgery of others. Only those qualified with clear vision, without a log in their own eye, should take on this task, always exercising patience and using wisdom. Galatians 6:1-2 *Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ²Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.* The person who intervenes in the life of a wayward brother or sister must be spiritual, gentle, wise and humble.

James addressed believers to reach out to other believers, who had wilfully strayed from their beliefs doctrinally and from the truth practically, in order to try to restore them. The correct response from the believer is to turn back those who have strayed from the truth.

The Greek word for **turn back** is *epistrepho*, which means to turn around and head in the opposite direction. It is a 180-degree reversal. James talked here about believers, who after making progress in the truth, doctrinally and practically, decided to do a 180-degree turn and went back in the wrong direction. They needed firm and gracious intervention.

Remember the importance that the person who intervenes in the life of a wayward brother or sister must be spiritual, gentle, wise and humble.

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If we delight in confronting a wayward believer then we probably shouldn't do it because we don't have the right attitude. If we have a *holier than thou* attitude, we will do more harm than good. All this will do is push the speck deeper in their eye rather than gently pulling it out.

James 5:20 *remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins.* The goal is always to rescue and restore our brother and sister, which quite often will take much patience, humility, gentleness and perseverance.

The Greek for **way or path** is *hodos*, which figuratively speaking means lifestyle direction. James talked about lifestyles that lead to a deathlike existence rather than physical death. We have already studied last time in James 5:14-16 that some unrepentant sin can lead to sickness and physical death.

James also said that when we save them from a deathlike experience we would *cover over a multitude of sins*. This has a double application. Not only does a person's confession of sin bring forgiveness for their wayward path they took, but it also prevents that person from continuing farther on that dead-end path. The damage that could have been done on that journey of personal sin will be covered.

Peter used the same term *cover* when he said in 1 Peter 4:8 *love covers a multitude of sins*. The intervention of loving Christians through prayer, patience, and perseverance will save not only that person from accumulating more sin and making a greater mess of their life, but will also spare the church from the damage done by a wayward brother or sister.

When we are thinking about getting involved in helping restore someone to the Lord, it is imperative that we first check our motives. We must have a genuine love for that person. We need to immerse ourselves with prayer, be ready to apply patience and be prepared that it may be take a long time.

It is good that James ends this letter to look out for wayward believers. The entire letter is to urge believers to make sure our outward actions accompany inner convictions and that our words match our deeds. James wrote a letter about authentic faith lived out in a hostile world. **His main theme is that genuine faith produces genuine works.** In other words, the person who has truly found **THE WAY** genuinely walks in it. James spoke powerfully into the most intimate areas of the believer's lives, and did so with love and with great care. The letter is as much for us believers today as it was for the believers of his day. Let's take the time to listen and apply his excellent wisdom to our lives today. The Pastors plea - **please don't let this just be another bible study series.**

We have seen from James' short practical manual on Christian living that:

- ✚ Real faith produces genuine stability.
- ✚ Real faith produces genuine love.
- ✚ Real faith produces genuine humility.
- ✚ Real faith produces genuine patience.

James lived an authentic life of faith. His authentic faith resulted in his death in AD 62. His words and works attracted thousands of Jews to Christ. Eusebius, the ancient church historian described his death. *Leading him into their midst they demanded of him that he should renounce Christ in the presence of all the people. But, contrary to the opinion of all, with a clear and with greater boldness than they had anticipated, he spoke out before the whole multitude and confessed that our saviour and Lord Jesus is the Son of God. But they were unable to bear the testimony of the man who, on account of his excellent virtue and piety, was esteemed by so many men, and consequently they slew him.* Eusebius recorded that James was thrown from the temple and then beaten to death with a club. James exemplified how a Christian Believer should live in this life.