

Readings

James 1:17–27; Mark 7:1–8, 14, 15, 21–23; Deuteronomy 4:1, 2,

Sermon

What did you notice when you arrived at church this morning? Can you describe the people on the welcoming team or tell what happened? Can you describe the people you talked to, hugged, shook hands or simply spoke to? Can you tell what was on the loop or describe how the minister began the service or what the music group was up to? How difficult it can be to remember what we've seen or what someone looked like or did.

On the morning after the night before we often look in mirror and don't recognise the person we see there. We wonder if we really are looking as bad as we're feeling. But how very strange it would be if we looked in the mirror and really saw a stranger looking out at us, because we really couldn't remember what we ourselves looked like. James says that the person who reads the Bible and doesn't do what it says is just like someone who looks in the mirror and then forgets what they look like.

Imagine what could happen if we ignore what we read. The paint may have already dried but we risk getting paint on our clothes; we may go for a swim in the river and be all right but we risk getting into difficulties, either going out of our depth or being swept along by strong currents; we may take a very short shortcut the wrong way down a one way street but we risk terrifying the wits out of other drivers or even causing an accident; we may park illegally and get away with it but we risk being caught by the warden and fined; in other words, we might get away with ignoring a warning, but if we keep ignoring the warning, sooner or later we will have to face the consequences.

64 But what happens if we ignore what the Bible says. The consequences are not just that one day we have to face God in judgement but that here and now we don't get the best out of life because we are ignoring all that God has shown us about himself, ignoring the way God wants us to live which he makes clear in the pages of the world's least read bestseller – the Bible.

Some of the way God wants us to live is spelled out in the practical instructions James gives in the passage we read from his letter earlier. We are called to:

- **Curb our tempers** – as James puts it: “You must all be...slow to get angry. Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires” – so no heated arguments, no irritability, no blowing a fuse when we don’t get our way, no getting angrily upset over trifles.
- **Clean up our minds** – as James puts it: “So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, throwing all spoiled virtue and cancerous evil in the garbage...” – so no dirty ideas, no adultery in the heart, no dwelling on impure thoughts, no drooling over soft porn, no opening those suggestive emails.
- **Control our tongues** – as James puts it: “If you claim to be religious but don’t control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless” – so no pious platitudes, no flowery language, no empty words, no hot air, no talking a good game as well as no gossip, lies, bad language or blue jokes.
- **Care for others** – as James puts it: “Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Care for orphans and widows in their distress, reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight” – so full-steam ahead for the COSY Café, building homes for leprosy-sufferers in India, befriending the lonely, caring and praying for neighbours in sickness and need, promoting Christian Aid, launching other reaching-out ideas under phase 2 of the Open Door Project – in short, sharing the words of the Bible in gift and in deed.
- **Commit our lives to Jesus** – as James puts it: “...humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls” – yes, let’s hand over our lives to Jesus so that he’s in charge, let’s have him on the throne of our lives, let’s hail him as our matchless King, let’s obey and confess him as Lord and Saviour.

Did you know that it’s possible to empty cups or mugs from your dishwasher that are sparkingly clean on the outside, but still dirty on the inside. When we just try harder to ‘be good’ it’s like cleaning the outside but leaving the inside dirty. When we commit our lives to Jesus we are changed inside and given the power to change radically and practically the way we live. So if you would like to talk or pray about commitment to Christ, don’t put it off but speak to me after the service.