

**Week 4**

**8 weeks**  
**TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE >>**

*'What good is it, my brothers, if a man  
claims to have faith but has no deeds?'*

**James 2:14-26**

**&**

**Luke 7:1-10**

# >> MORNING SERMON OUTLINE



## Am I a fraud? JAMES 2:14-26

The Bible is crystal clear about how we are saved. We are saved by God's grace as we put our trust in Jesus Christ. But how do we know that our 'faith' is genuine?

### > FAITH THAT IS FALSE...

...can you believe and not care?

...can you believe and not be forgiven?

### > FAITH THAT IS GENUINE...

...Abraham - costly obedience

...Rahab - risky action

### > HOW TO HAVE GENUINE FAITH...

**Faith lived out:** *The life of faith is more than a private transaction of the heart with God. It is the life of active commitment lived out as we obey God and care for those in need.*

*8 weeks*  
TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE >>

## >> A CLOSER LOOK

(James 2:14-26)



**NOTE:** Throughout the rest of the study, there are several questions for discussion. One or two of the questions allow a more creative approach. Feel free to adapt them as you see fit, but they are some ideas to prompt some more creative thinking! **These are marked by an asterisk \*.**

### >>Recap from last week

Read again **James 1:19-26**. A vital verse for the whole letter is verse 22. What should be happening as we read God's word? What are the examples that James gives of changes that will take place as we allow God's word to sink deep into our lives? Which have you seen in your own lives over the last few weeks?

### > FAITH: Genuine or counterfeit

*\*Spotting a fraud - list as many items as you can that have been copied or faked. In each case work out how you can distinguish between the genuine article and the counterfeit imitation. What are the potential dangers of a counterfeit?*

- James warns us that faith can be faked. So we need to ask the question: 'how can we make sure that our faith is genuine'?

James is clear that faith and action go hand in hand. James describes Christians as 'believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ' (2:1). That belief must be proved genuine by practical action and James gives us four examples – two negative and two positive.

### > The uncaring believer (14-17)

- How does James describe someone who claims to be a believer in Jesus but ignores the practical needs of someone they know?
- What opportunities do you have as an individual and through the ministries at The Ascension to care for people who are in need? What good stories can you share of faith being lived out in practical action?

- What needs do you see around us that are unmet at the moment? What could be done to meet these? What could you do?

## > **The believer with no assurance (v18-19)**

Someone might try and wriggle out of the need to keep faith and action together by claiming that these are like spiritual gifts. 'God has given me the gift of strong faith but not of practical action.' But James is not talking about spiritual gifts, rather his focus is on saving faith.

- James says that demons have faith of a sort. Their faith is one of 'belief' alone: that is, they know God exists. How does James describe their relationship with God?
- What marks out the relationship between God and someone with genuine faith? (See how Paul describes this in Romans 5:1-5).

## > **Abraham who obeyed (20-24)**

God had promised to Abraham that he would have millions of descendants. He had to wait 25 years before his promised son arrived. While he waited he struggled to trust God. After his son had been born, God tested him with the most severe test of all – that of sacrificing his son. If we read the text carefully (Gen 22:5) it seems that Abraham's trust had grown – he knew that he and Isaac would return. His obedience was truly outstanding.

- Genuine faith is marked by obedience. What areas of your life do you find it hard to trust God in? Why?

## > **Rahab who risked everything (24-26)**

Rahab's story is amazing (Joshua 2). She was an outsider in every sense to the promises of God – but realised that the God of Israel was the only one to trust. She risked her life as she trusted God and is recorded as an example of genuine faith.

- How does Rahab's story inspire you to trust God in the difficult areas?

## >> EVENING SERMON OUTLINE



### Faith in Action - LUKE 7:1-10

A Roman centurion was the only person in the gospels whose faith exceeded Jesus' expectations. His clarity of action and insight contrast with the worldly attitudes that characterise so much religion – in Jesus' day and ours.

#### > The incident: A sick servant and a remarkable response

#### > The person of great faith...

...acts on his knowledge of Jesus (v3)

...humbles himself at the greatness of Jesus (v6-7)

#### > Our response

## >> A CLOSER LOOK pt 2. (Luke 7:1-10)



### >>Recap from last week

- If you haven't yet done so, you may like to recap on last week and consider whether you have managed to make any changes in your life as a result? How did the study affect your life throughout the week?

### > Introduction

Roman soldiers weren't normally well regarded in 1<sup>st</sup> century Israel. But in amongst the normal brutality of an occupying army there were some good men – including the centurion in this incident. In v1 we see that he had a genuine care for his servant, and in v4-5 the Jewish leaders in the town commend him for being a friend of their people and even giving generously to build them a new synagogue.

But this centurion is not remembered for either of these, but for Jesus' commendation in v9: "*I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel.*"

- Take a moment to stop and reflect on *your* faith in Jesus. Wouldn't it be great to have Jesus describe it in that way? Do you think he might? If so, why?

### > Four helpful questions

If we're honest, we'd all admit that our faith doesn't quite merit that sort of commendation. But as we heard at the end of the sermon, this incident poses four questions that can help us to move in that direction.

#### 1. Are you prepared to act on what you know of Jesus?

In v1-3 we see the centurion acting decisively on news that Jesus was back in town. What did the centurion know about Jesus that led him to act in this way? (*Hint: Look at Luke 4:31-41 to see what Jesus had already done in Capernaum.*)

- What things do you know about Jesus? (*\*If you're looking at this in a group, why not write the answers on a big sheet of paper in the middle of the room*) Look at what you've written. How should you act on that?

## **2. Does what you know of Jesus lead you to humble yourself?**

- Having sent the first delegation, the centurion realises that his request for Jesus to come to his house might be misinterpreted. So in v6-8 he sends some friends with a second message. In this message, he evaluates Jesus in terms of his own profession (v7-8). What conclusion does he come to about Jesus?
- In the light of that, what does the centurion want to say about himself (v6-7)?
- Now think about Jesus in terms of your own profession or strengths. For example, if you're a doctor, who's better at healing – you or Jesus? If you're an administrator, who is better at organising things? Etc. How does this help you to be more humble?

## **3. Do you try and control Jesus by your own good deeds?**

- In v4-5 the Jewish leaders plead with Jesus on the basis of the good deeds that the centurion has done. Why is this foolish?
- Do you sometimes act and talk as if some people are more deserving of God's attention than others? Do you sometimes feel aggrieved that God has not done things that you wanted? How?

## **4. What can you do or say to exalt Jesus more?**

- The punch line of the story is Jesus' high praise for the centurion ("*I have not found such great faith, even in Israel*"). But the real story is the remarkably high view which this pagan soldier has of Jesus. So, what can you do or say to exalt Jesus further? How does your life bring glory to him, give a true account of him, and reflect genuine faith in him?
- List a few areas where your life could exalt Jesus more.



## MAKING A CHANGE *(James 2:14-26)*



### WHAT CHANGES CAN YOU MAKE THIS WEEK?

*It's important to act on what you have studied. Can you think of some specific changes that you can make during this week, as a response to what you have been looking at?*

- When you see or hear of someone in need, what is your immediate reaction? If you find yourself tempted just to get on with your busy life and the priorities you have – why not resolve to stop, pray for wisdom and take some caring action? Talk through with other believers what they do.
- Are you clear that you are obeying God in all that he has called you to do? If you haven't already done so, look back over the first three studies in James and see what action points are particularly relevant for you. Be inspired by Abraham and Rahab and resolve to obey God in all of these.



## MAKING A CHANGE *(Luke 7:1-10)*



### WHAT CHANGES CAN YOU MAKE THIS WEEK?

*It's important to act on what you have studied. Can you think of some specific changes that you can make during this week, as a response to what you have been looking at?*

Make a list of some areas in your life in which you know you could 'exalt' Jesus more (if you haven't already done so!). This week, take one (or more) of those areas and try to put some concerted effort into changing.

So, for example, if you find yourself regularly criticising other people, why not try going out of your way this week to actively affirm and encourage people?

Whatever it is that needs changing, develop 3 practical and specific ways to change this week.