

Today we've come to the very end of James' letter. And I said right at the beginning, "If I was to sum up the drive of this letter in one word, I'd use the word 'non-passivity'". There is nothing passive about the Christian faith – we don't just have it 'done to us'. Being a disciple of Jesus Christ, is a very active experience.

And I guess a statement of **James**, that sums it up best, is: "Faith without works is Dead"...

And today, as we finish off the final 2 verses of this letter, once again it's about non-passivity. James won't let us finish reading this letter, and then settle down to having a faith that doesn't do anything.

Let me read it for you again:

¹⁹ My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

Alright, he's telling us that as Christians – as disciples of Jesus, we have a responsibility – not just for ourselves – but a responsibility for our brothers and **sisters** in Christ. It's a responsibility, that when we notice them, departing from the truth – we have a responsibility to urge them, to turn back to truth.

Now, I reckon for us to get the most out of this, it'll be best to break it up into a few headings.

The first heading is:

1. James' example

The letter that we've just finished reading, is an example of a brother (James), bringing a wandering brother (or brothers) (his readers), back to the truth.

James has a deeply pastoral heart. And so should we. James cares, what happens to his brothers and sisters in Christ. And so should we.

James could see a particular problem in the church: There were people who had departed from the truth. There were people who **said** they believe – they **claimed** to have faith in Jesus, but their lives – their behaviour – their actions, were not the actions of **disciples** of Jesus....

And James says, “Will that kind of faith save you?” And of course it's implied “No, it won't.” And so in this letter, James has been teaching us, that faith without works, is dead. Faith, that is not accompanied by works, is not a saving faith...

He says, “You're deceiving yourselves – you think you're saved, but you're not.”...

And his love that he had for his brothers in Christ, meant that he could not stay silent, and so he had to attempt to lead them back to the truth, so that they might be saved. And he wrote this letter.

How successful was he? Well, that's up to us. Have we taken on board, what James has taught us? Have we been challenged, and will we attempt, to **live** as disciples of Jesus, actively following Jesus, and abiding by his teaching and commands??? If so, James has been very successful in leading us to the truth, saving us from spiritual death, and covering a multitude of our sins...

So, have you???

Have you been challenged, to walk as a disciple of Jesus? As a result of studying the letter of James, have you been challenged, to put your faith into action? I hope so, because what we do, reveals what we truly believe...

But not everybody **does** listen to James. As I've prepared to deliver, just about every message, as we've worked our way through James,,,, In my reading, I have encountered many views, trying to explain away, the challenge that James has very clearly laid down, for us, his readers. – They hold a theological mindset, that doesn't line up with what James is teaching (which by the way, is very much what Jesus taught),,, But they hold this mindset, and rather than letting the Scriptures, bring them back to the truth, they try to explain it away...

And so, some people will read the Letter of James, and **not** turn to the truth, and therefore not be saved... And their multitude of sins will not be covered... Or perhaps, as they teach their error, they may cause **others**, to not be saved...

And woe for them. Teachers will be judged more harshly... And if, as I teach, I cause one of His disciples to sin....
Woe...

So this letter, has been James, leading by example... Let's move on to the second heading:

2. The problem

The problem is (and I don't need to try and convince you that this is true – you've seen it happen) – The problem is, we've all seen Christians (our brothers and sisters in Christ), wander away from the truth.

- Some head off on weird tangents;
- Some give up faith altogether;
- Some get caught up in sin;
- Some get carried away by false teachers and false teachings;
- a young Christian lady might take up with an unbeliever, and she wanders away;
- Some get distracted by their sport
- Some get distracted by the making of money, and these things become more important to them, and they wander away...
- Some come to faith in an hour of need, but then they just seem to lose interest.
- Some turn to the wisdom of the world, and deny the wisdom of God...

There are whole denominations who have wandered from the truth. There are cults, who have wandered from the truth. Whole families, wander away from the truth, And individuals wander away from the truth.

It's actually a pretty common biblical theme: To wander away from the truth, is any deviation from the way of righteousness.

I wonder, would that include “backsliding”?

Do you know what I mean by “backsliding”?

If someone **says** they still believe, but they don't seem to be at all interested in God any more. They stop coming to worship; they don't serve in any Christian ministry; They're not evangelising – that is they're not inviting other people to come to Jesus...

What about them? I don't know. James says, “Faith without works is dead”... But that's God's judgment to make...

You see, it's not up to us to decide who's in and who's out. Our job is to encourage our brothers and sisters, who **seem** to be wandering from the truth (wandering from Christ; wandering from faith)... Our job is to encourage each other **on, in** the faith – to urge one another on in the truth – to believe the truth; and to act in truth...

The third heading, is:

3. The consequence

And I suppose the consequence of wandering from the truth – of deviating from the way of righteousness, depends on the nature of that deviation. Some sin leads to death, but not all sin leads to deathⁱ (1 John 5).

Unrepented sin, and apostasy (that is falling away from the faith all together), have a consequence – spiritual death...
Hell...

Now, if you hold to the teaching of men (which says) “once saved always saved”, you’re not going to like what the Bible says about this. You’re not going to like what James, and you’re not going to like what Paul says.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-2, Paul says: Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, ² and by which you **are being saved, if** you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

What’s he saying? Paul is saying, we are **being** saved, **IF** we hold **fast** to the truth. Otherwise, the faith we had for a while, is in vain. That’s what he’s clearly saying...

Again in Colossians 1, he’s talking about how we are reconciled with God, and will be presented ²²... holy and blameless and above reproach before him, ²³ **if** indeed you **continue** in the faith, stable and steadfast, **not shifting** from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Now I’m sorry if your theology won’t cope with that... But the Christian life, is a race we have to complete. If we give up half-way through it, we might as well not have startedⁱⁱ...

So, the fourth heading:

4. The Remedy

If those who wander from the path of righteousness, are spiritually dead (they're destined for Hell)... If those who **were** brothers or sisters in Christ, seem to be departing from Christ, what's the remedy???

Well, it's something that God does, but He does it through us...

In 1 Corinthians 1, Paul says that while we are waiting for Christ to return, God is faithful, and so He will sustain us to the endⁱⁱⁱ.

In Philippians, he says ^{Philippians 1: 6} **And I am sure of this, that he who **began** a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.**

God doesn't desire that **any** of us fall away. He wants **all** of His children to persevere to the end...

Ultimately it's up to us, whether we continue on in the faith, or whether we reject God...

But our Heavenly Father, uses His children (us), to encourage our brothers and sisters on in the faith...

In Hebrews 3 Paul says:

¹³ But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴ For we have come to

share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

Why do we exhort? Why do we urge one another on???
Because we save their souls...

God saves their souls, but **we** save their souls – God is doing it **through** us.

When somebody hasn't been to church for a while, who's job is it to go and visit them? Is it the minister's? ... If **you've** noticed somebody slipping away, it's **your** job...

We have to love each other enough, to find the lost wanderer, and to say, "Hey, you started the walk of faith... The truth that you accepted then, is still true today... The danger of not accepting that truth, is still the same danger for you today..."

Can you see how important this is??? We save their souls...

There are a lot of people, out there in the world, who at some stage, made a commitment to Christ,, but now He's dropped off their radar...

Well, I want to tell you this to give you confidence: Jesus might've dropped off **their** radar... But they **sure** haven't dropped off His...

And if it is The Lord's will, to bring to completion, what He has started... Wow, what a blessing it is, to be involved in this...

¹⁹ My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, ²⁰ remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins.

There's nothing passive about being a disciple of Jesus... We don't have it done to us. We're involved in God's work...

How many people do **you** know:

- Who started following Jesus, but aren't following Him any more
- Or who don't come to worship God any more?
- Or who have started following wrong teaching
- Or who are caught up in sin that they will not repent of?

Will you do your bit to bring them back???

Will you let God work through you, to bring them back?

Will you do that, to save their souls???

I'm going to put a one-sentence prayer up on the screen...

And we're going to have 2 minutes of silence, for you to pray that prayer, and see who God puts in your mind...

It may be one person, or it may be a dozen...

“Lord Jesus Christ, who do **I** know, who has wandered from the truth, and you want me to bring them back?”

ⁱ 1 John 5:16-17

ⁱⁱ 2 Peter 2:20-21 (ESV)

²⁰ For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world through the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first.

²¹ For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them.

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 1: ⁷ so that you are not lacking in any gift, as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁸ who will sustain you to the end, guiltless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹ God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.