

Foolish choices

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[0 : 00] Now, I don't know if you've ever, this will definitely have happened to you, but if you've ever looked at something so beautiful, so stunning, that it took your breath away.

I don't know, I could see, well done Will for pointing at Debbie. But it does happen, doesn't it? Lots of things in nature. A beautiful sunset perhaps, or I don't know if you're used to, if you're a hill walker, you climb to the top of a Monroe, you look out and it takes your breath away. Or maybe for you it's the perfect night sky where you go out, it's pitch black, and it seems like you can see every star. There's moments, isn't there, where we see that beauty, and we're captivated by it.

Now, when that happens to us, when you catch a glimpse of beauty like that, it can seem, maybe just for a moment, that nothing else really matters. It can seem that whatever's going on in your life right now, you look at that beautiful night sky, you look at that sunset, that nothing else really matters.

[1 : 22] Whatever you've got going in that particular moment, it takes a back seat as you admire the thing that you're looking at, the thing in front of you and you think. And you might even think, you know, this is just what I needed.

This is just what I needed. Some perspective, some distance from life to think and see the big picture. Because the truth is that there are lots of things that can occupy our minds. There are lots of things that can occupy our minds, good and bad. As we've been working our way through the book of James, One of the big ideas is what it means to live wisely, to live with wisdom, to be wise.

What wise living is and what it's not. What it is and what it's not. This morning, the focus is on what wisdom is not.

The focus is more specifically on unwise, foolish living. Decisions, ways of life, you might say, that are not wise.

[2 : 27] It is just as important to look at both sides. It is just as important to consider what is wisdom and what is not wisdom. And it's appropriate that we consider that and reflect on that in our own lives.

The reason it's important is because it's right as we consider the way that we may have lived unwisely, foolishly. It is right that we might feel a sorrow for the ways that we've done that and how that reflects on our lives, how we've treated others and how we've treated God.

But the one thing I want us to start off with before we go there. This is especially true when we're thinking about our sin really. And wrongdoing is that we get captivated at the same time as looking at our sin.

That we're also captivated by something beautiful. Now this is just advice. It's said by somebody much wiser than me that a good practice is that for every one look at sin, we take ten looks at Jesus.

For every one look at sin, we take ten looks at Jesus. The reason I'm saying that is because this is one of those passages that I think, well, it certainly does deal with sin.

[3 : 49] It brings up our sin. It alerts us in our hearts where the loves in our heart are disordered. Where we have chosen our own way instead of God's. And don't get me wrong, it is a good thing, a really good thing to feel that conviction to know we've messed up, but to remember that we're not condemned.

The more we look at sin, this doesn't mean look at sin less. It means look at Jesus more. For every one look at sin.

Take ten looks at Jesus. And we need to do that. We need to be convicted, but we need to do that in the right way. But actually, when we do it rightly, it can be and it should be, in many ways, looking at our own lives and looking at our sin and ten looks at Jesus, the most free and liberating and actually joyful experience to look at your sin, where you've messed up and been a daft day, to take long, sustained looks at the beauty of Jesus.

To take long, sustained looks at the sunset. Now, it's been quite a few weeks, as I mentioned, since we looked at James.

And so before we go into it, I just want us to, a whistle-stop toss, quick as I can, to refresh our memories of what the book of James is about. I've said already, it's about what it means to be wise, to live with wisdom.

[5 : 23] I'm just going to give you my own definition of what I think wisdom is. Wisdom, really, if you want to boil it down to it, it is worship in everyday life.

That is what wisdom is, worship in everyday life. It doesn't mean, which is, I think it's a very practical way of thinking about it. Now, that wisdom in it, worship in everyday life, that in itself can sound a bit super spiritual.

What does that mean? Well, I'm going to boil it down for you even further. It means doing everything with humility and love for others. Worship in everyday life means doing everything with humility and love for others.

And the reason I bring that up is because that is what we see all the way through James. All the way through James, we see humility present. Right from the off, chapter 1, verse 5, you remember the amazing prayer, if any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault and it will be given to you.

That's humility. If you ask for wisdom, you're admitting being humble, saying, I'm not wise because I need you to give it to me. We start with humility.

[6 : 38] And then we get towards the end of the chapter, chapter 1, what that looks like day to day. It's summarised at the end of chapter 1, verses 26 and 27. You'll see he mentions true religion.

Three things about true religion. Keep a tight rein on your tongues. Look after orphans and widows in their distress. And then keep oneself from being polluted by the world. They're all about love. Wisdom is humility and love. They're all about love. Loving with people how you speak. Loving in how you treat people that are different. The poor, in this case. And loving God's ways instead of the world's.

It's all humility and love. The next two and a bit chapters take those three ideas and elaborate them. You had showing favouritism in chapter 2. That's not loving people who are different.

Taming the tongue. How we speak in chapter 3. We need to tame it so that we love people with our tongues. And then the world's value system. We get that in the end of chapter 3 and beginning of 4.

[7 : 40] The wisdom from the world. Loving the world's ways more than God's. Wisdom is worship in everyday life. Doing everything with humility and love for others.

And as we saw the last time. It cycles. First we get it. The beginning of chapter 4. Cycles all the way back. Verse 6. God opposes the proud.

But shows favour to the humble. Humble yourselves before the Lord. And he will lift you up. Verse 7. Submit yourselves to God.

Resist the devil. He will flee from you. Come near to God. And he will come near to you. It's about admitting that you're not wise. Admitting that you've done all the things that it says in this book don't do.

We've all been unwise with our tongues. We've all shown favouritism. And we've all loved the world. Humble yourselves before the Lord and he'll lift you up. That's what it means.

[8 : 42] The wisest thing you can do is say I'm not wise. Give me wisdom. So that's a whistle stop tour of James so far. And in the last part of the book.

Which we'll be looking at today. Our next Sunday to finish it off. From verse 11 onwards. He continues these three ideas. But he makes them more specific.

The idea of how we use our tongue. How we treat the poor. And how we think about our love for the world and our love for God. He's more specific about how to speak. How to avoid the world.

And how to treat others. He does it in two parts. And the first part is how not to do that. So that's what we're looking at today. How not to do that.

And the first one that we think about that comes from verse. That starts in verse 11. Is about how we speak. And it is specific. We see that verse 11 is about slander.

[9 : 42] Verse 11. 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're not keeping it. But sitting in judgment on it. There's a very specific way of not loving people with your words. Slandering them. It can be done in two ways.

Either to their face or behind their back. Either way it is speaking evil. And words that tear people down. As you might remember.

As you read in chapter 3. That the words that do that are described as a fire. Or a deadly poison. At the root of it. It is being judgmental.

The root of it is pride. It is trying to make yourself look better. Because you know what happens when you gossip or slam to someone. What you're saying to the person that you're gossiping about.

[10 : 38] Is. I'm telling you that this person has done something. That I don't agree with. And in doing that. I'm saying. I'm not like that. I'm not like that.

So you should think more highly of me than the person that I'm gossiping about. Because we agree that I'm not like that. Because if I was like that. I wouldn't be gossiping about it. That's what you're doing when you're gossiping.

And it's prideful. Now we just need to pause here. We do just need to pause. Because what it doesn't mean. Is that we should never correct anybody. That's what it doesn't mean.

Sometimes people think that if you're. People think that you're judging. If you call anybody out on doing something they shouldn't. You hear that don't you. Who are you to judge me.

Stop judging me. That's not what we're talking about here. Loving correction is different isn't it.

Loving correction is different. It is coming alongside someone with the aim of restoration.

[11 : 36] That is different to being judgmental. It is different to slander and gossip. Behind someone's back. But what's really fascinating here. Is that there is an extra reason given.

A deeper reason. As to why you shouldn't slander. Because what we read is that when you slander. It reveals something else that's going on in your heart. We see that you speak against the law.

And become a judge of the law itself. Slightly tricky thing to understand what James means here.

But essentially. What does God. What are the two most important things that God says in the law. He says love God and love neighbour. When you ignore that law. You're saying I know better.

You're saying my way is better.

You're basically saying I know better than the law. When what you're actually saying in your actions is. This law isn't very good. Because I feel that I'm able and allowed to break it.

[12 : 38] If you thought it was good you'd keep it. That's how we act with our British laws isn't it.

We all agree that choosing a side of the road to drive on is a good law. It's a pretty good law. It's good that our government have said everyone drives on the same side.

It would be bad wouldn't it. If they said drive on whichever side of the road you like. Just drive wherever. Just drive wherever is fine. That would be. That we would agree that that would be. That would be a bad law.

Drive wherever you like. But. If you. I mean. You can choose to do this. You'd be breaking the law. But if you decide to ignore that rule. If you decide.

I'm just going to drive on the right hand side. What your actions say. To everyone else. Is that you think you know better than the law. You've become a judge of the law.

And you're sitting over it saying. I know better. You think you know better than the ones who've made up the driving laws and the regulations. The living God tells his people to love.

[13 : 39] If you think you can ignore that. And speak to people. About people however you want. What you're really saying is that you know. How to live in God's world better than he does.

And that his laws are not good. Verse 12. There is only one lawgiver and judge. The one who is able to save. And destroy.

It's Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. Who never slanders. Or speaks evil. About you.

He never slanders or speaks evil. About anyone. Anyone. No matter what. No matter how they've treated him. He never speaks evil. Or slanders them. He only speaks what is true and good.

Isn't that amazing. Isn't that quite profound. That Jesus Christ. Who's the one.

[14 : 41] Who's been treated the worst. Out of all people. Never. For anyone. Not a single person. In the whole of human history. Has he ever spoke evil about.

Or slanders. Not once. He's never said a bad word. About you. Or anyone. He's only said true words. That sometimes we might not want to hear.

But it's true. And it's good. Words that correct us. But he has never. And he will never. Speak unkindly to you. Or about you. Behind someone's back.

He will only ever speak words. That aim to build you up. With his aim to restore you. And to save you. Take ten looks. By Jesus Christ.

Now how. No matter how many words you've said. No matter how many times. You've acted like. You know better. He never stops. Never stops. Speaking words. To bless you.

[15 : 37] Words in prayer. Interceding for you. Words. In the scriptures. To encourage you. And to help you. And to bless you. So that's the first one.

The second one. Is about loving the world's values. The world's way of doing things. Look at. From verse 13. Making boastful plans.

Is arrogant. Now look with me. In verse 13. Now listen. You who say today. Or tomorrow. You'll go to this. Or that city. Spend a year there. Carry on business.

And make money. Why you don't even know. What will happen tomorrow. What is your life. You're a mist. That appears for a little while. And then vanishes. Instead you ought to say. If it is the Lord's will.

We will live and do this. Or that. Everyone is time poor. Time is the one commodity. That everyone has the same amount of. Which means.

[16 : 35] How we use our time. Is one area. That we find difficult. To give to. Put into the Lord's hand. It's the number one. I think. It's the number one area. Of people's lives. That we want to maintain control.

How we decide to use our time. Or perhaps more. Specifically. How this passage says. We want to use our time. Is important. But importantly.

Look at the illustration. From James. It is totally. What we don't really want to hear. That our lives. Are like a mist. Quite common.

To this part of the world. When I first came up. I was. I didn't know what somebody. Was talking about. They were talking about the ha. What's he talking about. Somebody tried to talk to you. About the ha.

That comes in off the sea. No idea. Then. Got a. Thing. It's off the Scottish. East coast. Most of you will know. That the ha. It's the thick fog. That comes.

[17 : 33] Normally in the spring. A thick fog. Can't see anything. But as the day moves on. The sun comes out. And normally by lunchtime. Or mid afternoon. With the heat. And the rays of the sun. This thick.

Coastal fog. Disappears. Now you first read that. That is insulting. Isn't it? That you compared. Your life. Is compared. To something. That like. That in nature. The mist. The ha. The mist. It doesn't have a say.

When it arrives. And it doesn't have a say. When it'll leave. I mean. You can't even grab hold. Of the ha. And put it in a bottle. It's so. Not nothing.

If you blow on it. It moves. It has no stability. Time is short. Time is short. Our lives. Are short.

[18 : 32] You're a mist. The heart. And our plans. Are much the same. Tomorrow is not a given. Tomorrow is not a given. It means be thankful. For every day. And if you.

I don't know. Have you ever listened to someone. It's amazing. You listen to someone. Who. Who's had a really. Near death experience. For months. Afterwards. They have this.

New like. Zeal. Approach. To life. Where every day. They just. They're just happy to be here.

They've got this. New zeal. And zest. And. Happy to be here. Well we find it hard.

To live in today. The majority of the time. We. We're nostalgic. About the good times. Or lament our mistakes. Or we live in tomorrow. Either with. Anxiety.

Or with overconfidence. And we miss. What God is doing today. Don't miss what God's doing today. Tomorrow. Tomorrow never comes.

[19 : 27] Does it? Because there's always tomorrow. You see what we read. That we live with the world's value.

Of having our agenda. At all costs. If we do that. What does it say? A terrible word. To describe the person. That's like this. Arrogance. Terrible quality. To be labelled with. Isn't it? Arrogance. Think on this. You're a mist. Your plans. Your days. Are in the hands. Of the almighty. You just need to pause again. And say what it doesn't mean. Because it doesn't mean. That careful wise deliberation.

And planning. Is bad. It doesn't mean. Making all plans. Are bad. And we should just be spontaneous. Every day. When we get up. And see what the day brings. We'd never get anything done. Well.

I certainly would have. What it really means. Is living in a way. Where your plans. Are the most important thing. It means. Living in a way.

[20 : 23] In a manner of. Expectation. And entitlement. That what you want. Will happen. And is the right thing to happen. And when it doesn't. It leads to anger. And frustration.

When your plans. Don't come to fruition. Or if people get in the way. Of your plans. And they're the ones. To suffer. What's really happened then. This is when. You become a slave. To your plans. And you don't love others well. Now. You know. What you really do. In life. Is.

That's not actually. The most important thing. What you do. Is not. Actually. The most important thing. It's how you do it. Every day. You know. Whether you claim toilets. From a bank.

Or a shop. Do it with a lot. Do it with thankfulness. And not entitlement. Or your own. Expectations. Do it with the Lord. Every breath in your lungs.

[21 : 17] The food on your table. The roof over your head. The clothes on your back. Your morning coffee. Do it with thankfulness. If you wake up.

And think. This is how. Today needs to be. This is how. My year needs to be. Or else. Let me tell you. You'll be discontent.

And miserable. And full of anxiety. If it doesn't go your way. You will be. The reason I know that. Is because I'm talking from experience. I've been there. And I've felt that.

And I know that you can. Have reasons inside your head. Where you think. It needs to be this way. Jesus Christ. used his time perfectly. He had a perfect plan.

He had a perfect plan. That he had decided. Before the beginning of time. With the Father. And the Spirit together. Our God in three persons. Decreed. Made a plan. That in time. Jesus Christ. Would come and follow the plan.

[22 : 12] In time. To the letter. But involved in that plan. Was how he would use his time. Not for his own advantage. But to bless you and me. Look at how much he spent.

With other people. Who needed him. He never treated them. As a burden. On his time. Even. Even when he wanted. To go and pray. On his own.

They chased him. And he went and ministered to them. And fed 5,000 people. When he was knackered. He's a saviour like that today. He will always have.

Time for you. He'll never send you away. Because his agenda is to bless you. To be there for you. Always. It's the only agenda. That can always take precedence. Because we're the object.

Of his affection. And love. So that's the second one. The third one. Is about how we treat people.

[23 : 09] Who are different. We see. That defrauding the poor. Is deceptive. Defrauding the poor. With deception. Firstly.

Before we get into that. We have this. Big idea. That this opinion. Of wealth. And people who store up wealth. For themselves. Verse 2. Your wealth has rotted.

Moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. Perhaps the strange thing. About this illustration here. Is that. Gold and silver. Don't actually corrode. They're not reactive metals.

So they resist corrosion. So it's quite strange. Your gold and silver corrode. Sin. Well you see. What he's really saying. Is that the objects. The things of this world. The wealth.

Is totally worthless. The gold and silver. Has become like a cheap old. Rusty metal. Like an old beat up car. That needs to be scrapped. The wealth is rotten.

[24 : 07] Like an apple. That looks juicy. On the outside. But you take a bite. And it's moldy. And full of worms. That's what. That's what. A rich. Your riches. Accrue. Without the Lord Jesus.

They are worthless. However. That's not the worst thing. In this passage. In this section. It's that. It is the poor. Who are used to fund the lavishness.

Verse 4. Look. Behold. Stay. To grab. Grab your attention. Look. The wages you fail to pay the workers.

Who mowed your fields. Are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters. Have reached the ears. Of the Lord. Almighty. All the time.

That the workers were working. In the fields. And the. Whoever was. The guy in charge. Was ignoring their cries. The Lord. Almighty. Heard them. The Lord.

[25 : 05] Almighty. Heard their cries. And. They cry out. Against them. You have lived on. Verse 5. You have lived on earth. In luxury. And self-indulgence.

You have fattened yourselves. In the day of slaughter. You have condemned. And murdered the innocent one. How someone treats another person. An image bearer of God. Is. It's a direct reflection. Actually.

How they treat God. Now. I've used this illustration before. So bear with me. If you've heard it. But it's. I can't think of a better one. When I was young.

I don't know. But you had posters. Images of footballers. On my bedroom wall. Having their image. Having their image. On my wall. Demonstrated. That I thought highly of them. The real person.

Who they were an image. Of. Whoever that person was. Now. Maybe. When you were young. You had posters. Of a band. Or. I don't know why. But when I was in university. There was a classic thing. There was loads of people.

[25 : 59] Who just had like. Shea Guevara. Or. Bob Dylan. Or. Audrey Hepburn. She was a classic. On their wall. To show. This is. This is. Somebody who. I admire.

Because how you treat the image. Shows how you feel. About the real thing. If however. You. You have an image. A poster. And you throw darts at it.

It does suggest. That if. That you don't like the real thing. Doesn't it? You throw darts at a picture. It suggests. That the person. Who the image is of. That you don't actually like them. How you treat people.

The image bearers of God. Shows how you treat God himself. If people are there. To provide for you. And you're willing to treat them. With contempt. To fund.

Your lavishness. And you treat them. However you want. It shows that you think. God is there. To meet your needs. And you can treat him. With contempt. How you treat the image. Of God.

[26 : 56] Is how you treat God. But every person. Is equal before that. Goes back to chapter 2. We don't show favoritism. We don't look at people. And treat them differently.

With regards to. What they can. Or they can't. Can or they can't. Give us. Jesus. Jesus Christ. Treat everyone.

The same respect. And didn't they? It doesn't mean. He doesn't confront people. But he looked at the vulnerable.

The poor. The excluded. The marginalized. We thought about. The other week. How he was born. Into the muck of life. He was born. Into a stable.

The lowest of the law. Just like one of us. He hung out. With non-desirables. Who had nothing. To give him. He hung out with people.

[27 : 51] Who actually brought shame on him. For hanging out with them. This is what Jesus is like. For us. He's the same savior.

The same God. Because. If we were to look at ourselves. We know that. We are actually the. The non-desirables. That he chooses to hang out with you.

To love you. To be with you. In the muck of life. He treats you. With the same dignity. And respect. Because he knows.

That. How he treats you. Reflects on how he loves us. All that. Because you're a much better. Each one of us.

Can look at these three things. How we talk to people. How we use our words. How we make plans. With arrogance.

[28 : 49] And how we treat people who are different. And know that we have regret. Because we've all been. We've all been arrogant. We've all been angry. When our plans don't go as we want. We've all.

Treat people. It doesn't have to be that they're financially poor. But those who don't benefit us.

We've excluded them. Those that we wouldn't want to see us. To be hanging around with. We've all done it.

It is right to own. The way that we've lived. The wisest thing to do is to admit you're not wise. But to ask then. Give me wisdom.

Make me worship in everyday life. Make me a humble man. A humble person. Who can love others. Give me wisdom Lord.

Make me wise like Jesus Christ. And we do that. We take ten looks at Jesus. Every time we look at our sin. We take ten looks at Jesus. Because he speaks to you today.

[29 : 48] With forgiveness for the ways that you've not done that. He wants to bless you. To speak kind words to you. He's made a plan. To bless you. He always uses his time. He never has.

He always has enough time for you. He doesn't exclude you today. But whatever you've done. However you feel convicted. Because of that. You're welcome. The door is always. Open. From Jesus. Come. Admit you're not wise. And I'll make you wise. He'll never leave you. He'll never forsake you. His door is always open. He always has time. And he speaks forgiveness to you today. Let's pray. Almighty God.

We do want to confess that. There is conviction here. Because of the way that we've lived. That. There's part of us that doesn't want to admit that. We have used our tongues to slander and gossip.

[30 : 59] We have made plans. And got angry when they didn't. Things didn't turn out as we'd wanted. And we have. Treated people differently to us.

By. Not wanting to be associated with them. Or excluding them. Or. Looking. Looking at people as to what they can. How they can benefit us. We've lived. Foolishly.

Without wisdom. But I thank you. That you tell us here. In your word. That the wisest thing we can do. Is to come. And admit that we're not wise. And to ask.

Lord Jesus. Would you make us wise? Would you make us to. Have decisions. In everyday life. That are worshipful decisions. Even in the ordinary moments.

Would you make us. Humble. And loving. To all people. To love you. And to love our neighbour. Father. And so we're sorry.

[31 : 59] But we thank you. And we praise you. That we don't. Come here condemned. But we come here. Knowing that you're the one. Who does. The whole law perfectly. That you speak.

Not with evil. But with. Good. God. And truth. And forgiveness. That you always have time for us. You never shun us. Or push us away. And I thank you.

That you treat us all. With dignity. And respect. That you're such a good saviour. You're. The beauty that we see in you. Is magnificent. And so bless us.

Help us. To live for you each day. We ask for this in the name of Christ. Amen.