



## Parish of Finchampstead and California

# THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

## 26 - 31 JULY 2021

### INTRODUCTION

This week we conclude our readings from the letter of James. As usual the text in bold type gives a focus for the day's Thought.

### MONDAY - James 2:1-13

**<sup>1</sup> My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favouritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? <sup>2</sup> For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, <sup>3</sup> and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, 'Have a seat here, please', while to the one who is poor you say, 'Stand there', or, 'Sit at my feet', <sup>4</sup> have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?** <sup>5</sup> Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? <sup>6</sup> But you have dishonoured the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? <sup>7</sup> Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

<sup>8</sup> You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' <sup>9</sup> But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. <sup>10</sup> For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. <sup>11</sup> For the one who said, 'You shall not commit adultery', also said, 'You shall not murder.' Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. <sup>12</sup> So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. <sup>13</sup> For judgement will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgement.

### ***Thought for the day***

*One of the rules of St Benedict is to see Christ in every stranger. But how difficult it is in practice to do this. We seem to be programmed to assess people according to the world's criteria rather than God's. We are impressed by all the wrong things - wealth, status, celebrity. James sees this for the evil it is, describing it as incompatible with true faith in Jesus (v1). The picture he paints (v2-4) is all too familiar. But in behaving like this we are ignoring the requirement to love our neighbours as ourselves (v8-9). Who do we favour? Who are we partial to?*

### TUESDAY - James 2:14-26

**<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? <sup>15</sup> If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, <sup>16</sup> and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill', and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? <sup>17</sup> So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.**

<sup>18</sup> But someone will say, 'You have faith and I have works.' Show me your faith without works, and I by my works will show you my faith. <sup>19</sup> You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. <sup>20</sup> Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith without works is barren? <sup>21</sup> Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? <sup>22</sup> You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. <sup>23</sup> Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness', and he was called the friend of God. <sup>24</sup> You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. <sup>25</sup> Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when

she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? <sup>26</sup> For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

## ***Thought for the day***

*James returns to the issue of faith and works (see 1:22-25 and last Saturday's Thought). When he asks whether faith can save us (v14), we know the answer is 'yes'. He suggests that it is not simply 'yes' but 'yes but'. That 'but' relates to our response to our faith, and he gives us another picture to show the absurdity of thinking that we can claim to have faith if we ignore the demands of the poor and needy (v15-16). Faith that leaves us unchanged is not simply hollow, but dead (v17).*

## **WEDNESDAY - James 3:1-18**

<sup>1</sup> Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. <sup>2</sup> For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. <sup>3</sup> If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. <sup>4</sup> Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. <sup>5</sup> So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! <sup>6</sup> And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. <sup>7</sup> For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, <sup>8</sup> **but no one can tame the tongue—a restless evil, full of deadly poison.** <sup>9</sup> **With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God.** <sup>10</sup> **From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so.** <sup>11</sup> Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and brackish water? <sup>12</sup> Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh.

<sup>13</sup> Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. <sup>14</sup> But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. <sup>15</sup> Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. <sup>16</sup> For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. <sup>17</sup> But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. <sup>18</sup> And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

## ***Thought for the day***

*James is alert to the damage that can be done by loose talk, gossip and malice. We may feel he is stressing too much the dangers in what we say - after all we use our speech to encourage others, to console and to communicate good news. But many of us have had the experience of long spells of saying the right or appropriate thing being destroyed in a moment by a sarcastic or snide remark or a clever but hurtful joke at someone else's expense. James puts it starkly: one moment we praise God in worship, the next we curse our neighbour (v9-10). What are the ways in which we need to keep our own tongues under control (v8)?*

## **THURSDAY - James 4:1-12**

<sup>1</sup> Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? <sup>2</sup> You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. <sup>3</sup> You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. <sup>4</sup> Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. <sup>5</sup> Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, 'God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us'? <sup>6</sup> But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'

<sup>7</sup> Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. <sup>8</sup> Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. <sup>9</sup> Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. <sup>10</sup> **Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**

**11 Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters.** Whoever speaks evil against another or judges another, speaks evil against the law and judges the law; but if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. <sup>12</sup> There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who, then, are you to judge your neighbour?

## ***Thought for the day***

*Today's reading starts with reflections on some of the 10 Commandments, emphasising that Christians cannot set them aside; in fact their obligation to keep them prevents them becoming separated from God (v1-6). Having a right relationship with God requires repentance (v7-10) and humility (v10). Not only that but we have to live in harmony with one another (v11), not judging others (v11-12). It's clear that the Christians to whom James was writing were in danger of setting aside important aspects of Jesus' teaching in the Gospels - see for example Mark 10:43-45 on humility and Matthew 7:1-5 on judging others. In what ways do we try to put such teaching into practice?*

## **FRIDAY - James 4:13-5:6**

<sup>13</sup> Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a town and spend a year there, doing business and making money.' <sup>14</sup> Yet you do not even know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

<sup>15</sup> Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wishes, we will live and do this or that.' <sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast in your arrogance; all such boasting is evil. <sup>17</sup> Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.

**5.1 Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you.**

<sup>2</sup> Your riches have rotted, and your clothes are moth-eaten. <sup>3</sup> Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you, and it will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure for the last days. **<sup>4</sup> Listen! The wages of the labourers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.** <sup>5</sup> You have lived on the earth in luxury and in pleasure; you have fattened your hearts on a day of slaughter. <sup>6</sup> You have condemned and murdered the righteous one, who does not resist you.

## ***Thought for the day***

*Just like Jesus in his exchange with the rich young man (Mark 10:17-23), James draws attention to the perils of wealth. He puts it in the starkest of terms (v1) and contrasts the fate of the rich (v2-3) with that of the poor whom they oppress (v4), who have the ear of God. We might be reminded of the words of the Magnificat - God has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty (Luke 1:53). Most people think of others as rich, not themselves, thereby sidestepping this uncomfortable teaching. But the important question is: what does God think about our stewardship of the resources we have, however great or small they may be?*

## **SATURDAY - James 5:7-20**

<sup>7</sup> Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. <sup>8</sup> You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. <sup>9</sup> Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors. <sup>10</sup> As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

<sup>12</sup> Above all, my beloved, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your 'Yes' be yes and your 'No' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

**<sup>13</sup> Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. <sup>14</sup> Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. <sup>16</sup> Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. <sup>17</sup> Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and**

for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. <sup>18</sup> Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest.

<sup>19</sup> My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, <sup>20</sup> you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

### ***Thought for the day***

*No-one could accuse James in this letter of not being down to earth. He writes forcefully of things we know are important in the lives of Christians, even when as yesterday we'd prefer to shuffle them under the carpet. In this final section he reminds his readers that Jesus will return (v7-8) and offers practical instructions for holy living in the meantime: these speak to many sorts and conditions of men and women (v13-16). These verses sum up so much that ought to be good in any community of Jesus' followers. Do we have this depth of fellowship, trust and confidence in one another? These words would be good ones to turn into a prayer for ourselves and for our churches, asking God to help us be more open to all that he has in store for us through the ministry others give to us, and we to them.*

JRE / 17.6.21