

## 02 JAS The Clash of Cultures

Hello everyone. In our previous broadcast we introduced our new teaching series we are calling The Upside Down Kingdom using the book of James as our text. Our goal is to work our way through this small letter and examine the different ways to follow Jesus which are often radically different from the ways of the world in which we live.

As you know, we live in a world that does not value the things God values. What a shame that is! The world is his! He is the one who sets the standards! Yet the world ignores him to its peril. I want to demonstrate today, again before we dive into the text, three ways the world does not value God's kingdom.

The culture of the world says, "satisfy me now." Just listen to the commercials for various products. The manufacturers of these products say, "you must have this now. You need this to make your life happy now." I saw this recently where the slogan of a well-known product says, "Live for now." That is their advice for the world. But is this not a characteristic of children? Children have to have it right now and if they don't get it now they cry. Part of the job of parenting is to teach our children to wait and in waiting they receive what is the best and develop character.

So, the kingdoms of this world say, "Live for now." The culture of the kingdom of God says, "Live for the future. Focus on eternity." One man prayed, years ago, a prayer I thought so important that I wrote it down – "God help me to see what matters most. Help me to invest in eternal realities. If I must forego present things for future results, give me the strength to do that. Focus me eternally."

James speaks to this in 5:7-8, "Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord's coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm, because the Lord's coming is near."

Second, the world teaches that life is about consuming. "I want it bigger. I want it better. I want it brighter. I want it more beautiful."

The kingdom of God teaches us that we are not here primarily to consume but to contribute. Our prayer needs to be, "Lord, show me where and how I can give and serve today in your name." Listen to James 1:27, James' famous description of what true religion is. "Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of *our* God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, *and* to keep oneself unstained by the world."

I love this verse because it presents such a balanced view of what matters to God. Some people are very socially active. They love to invest in causes dealing with the injustices of the world. That's good. We should address injustices. We should seek to meet needs. James mentions two major ones, widows and orphans. But sometimes people get involved in such causes and they give no thought to their morals. James says we need to keep ourselves unstained by the world.

On the other hand, some people are very careful morally. They do a good job of keeping themselves unstained from the world. But they are so preoccupied with their personal purity, they never give a thought to meeting the needs of others. James tells us that pure and true religion embraces both private morality and public justice.

This is indeed the upside down kingdom. The world says, “I am here to consume. Jesus leads on a path to contribute to those in need and to develop our character in private.

Here is the third way the kingdom of God clashes with the culture of the world. Our world tells us that truth is relative. “There is no absolute truth. You have your truth, I have my truth, and we’ll all get along.” But a society cannot live for long that way. Eventually, one so-called “truth” will prevail and it will usually be the one that has the biggest gun and it will impose its so-called “truth” upon all others, but by then it is too late. The kingdom of God comes and tells us that there is absolute, eternal truth and it is found in the biblical record and supremely in Jesus Christ and what he has done for us.

Thus, we have this word from the pen of James in 1:21. “Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.”

James tells us to submit to God’s word, to the biblical view of truth – “humbly accept the word planted in you.” Don’t live by your so-called truth, your opinion. Learn God’s opinion. Learn God’s word. Accept it and live by that.

That’s what this series is about, following the way of Jesus. Following Jesus’ kingdom agenda. Our prayer is for every person to be:

1. Eternally focused rather than living for the moment.
2. Give and and serve rather than consume ... consume ... consume.
3. Established in the truth of Jesus Christ and His word.

Our prayer is that every aspect of ministry, every group, every life, every family, every church and every outreach will be an expression of God’s kingdom culture. When we do this we will become an answer to Jesus’ prayer for us in John 17. You know, we like to have answers to our prayers. Have you ever thought of being an answer to Jesus’ prayer? Listen to what he prayed for us.

13 “I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

“Don’t take them out of the world,” Jesus prayed. “Protect them while they are in the world. Sanctify them, that is, set them apart by your truth.” Jesus wants us to remain in the world but not to be of the world. This is another way of saying “let your light shine.”

We Christians have not always done a good job at this. And it's not the easiest thing to do – to live in this world and not be swallowed up by it. Let me share with you some extremes that some have fallen into.

First is the extreme of self righteousness. Self righteousness is the end result of something that probably started off good. We get really focused on doing what is right and thinking what is right and being with the right people and we start growing and all of this is good but then we make the fatal mistake of saying, "Look at me. I'm a pretty good person. Look at them. They aren't."

Or as Christians we can say, "We really have it together here as a community of Christians," and we forget that we are what we are only by God's mercy and grace. We can start to think we are intrinsically better than others when we are not.

The second extreme is worldliness. And this is where our goals, our giving, our morals, our speech, our habits, and what excites us is no different than the people around us who are far from God. This is the condition of the church in America today.

It's a difficult balance to achieve – to be in the world, but not to be of the world and to be normal, yet different, not weird, but different for Jesus' sake.

Sometimes we all get a little skewed, a little out of balance, maybe for a while a little self righteous and at other times we may indulge in things we have no business being involved in or our attitudes drift in ways not pleasing to the Lord. That's why we have God's word and one another to help us on the journey. As we grow, we find that we are spending less time on the edges of these extremes and more time in the middle, living a normal life in the world yet not being of the world but being a light. It takes time to learn this.

Let me close today by whetting your appetite some more for this book. Let me give you a highlight or a preview from each chapter.

A Chapter 1 highlight is James 1:17 – "Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens. He never changes or casts a shifting shadow." Isn't that good. I can't wait to explore that with you about the goodness of God and his good gifts to us.

Here is a chapter 2 highlight. It is from verses 14-16: "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?" That's a great challenge to show our faith with our lives.

A chapter 3 highlight deals with the power of our speech which can be an instrument for good or a destructive force of evil. Here are verses 5-6: "Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell." Powerful words!

A chapter 4 highlight is this, external wars are caused by internal wars. Listen to verse 1: “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?” If only the world would heed this, we would see wars cease, swords beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks thus fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah.

Last, a chapter 5 highlight pertains to the power of prayer. James 5:16 famously says, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.”

I can hardly wait to get into it. We have one more preliminary task to achieve. We want to learn about the author. Some surprises await some of you when we investigate this. I hope you'll join us for it.