

The Jesus Difference

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Before I begin my message this morning, I want to honor two groups of people that may be here or are watching online.

First, I want to honor the 2020 graduates. I am saddened by the fact that graduation ceremonies and celebrations have been cancelled or scaled back. So, this morning we want to say congratulations to you for all your hard work. If you are graduating from High school, college, bible school, or any other school please stand!

The second group I want to honor is our doctors, nurses and first responders. Today is normally our First Responder Sunday where they bring all their equipment for the kids to explore. But we cancelled it for this year. This has been a tough time for those on the front lines of this crisis. Many have put their lives at risk in caring for and protecting us. If you are a doctor, nurse, aide, or someone helping on the front lines with the Covid-19 pandemic or if you are a first responder such as EMT, Fire, Police, Sheriff or other -please stand!

VIDEO- By Gina Miller who attends Petra. She and her husband Kevin and family are First Responders in our community.

KIDS – Draw a picture of a firefighter, nurse, police, or emergency ambulance person helping someone.

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The Jesus Difference

I want to begin my message this morning by posing an important question. As we encounter pandemics, persecution, death, tragedies, and trials of many kinds - **How does Jesus make a difference in our lives?** How does, or should, being a Jesus follower impact how we respond?

The world right now is churning with fear, pain, anger, and hopelessness. Many have no real faith in God to help them. The question the world is asking, and wondering, **is whether Jesus really does make a difference.**

As followers of Jesus we encounter many of the same trials and struggles non-Christians experience.

It rains on the just and unjust. **Covid-19 and varying degrees of racism affect Christians and non-Christians alike.** So, what difference does Jesus make in our lives in how we respond and deal with these life issues?

We find some encouragement in the book of James written by James. James was the brother of Jesus, and the leader of the Jerusalem church. He has something important to say to us this morning.

James addresses his letter to the Jewish believers who because of persecution were having a very difficult time as Christians.

- They were hated by the religious leaders and the government.
- They were experiencing extreme financial pressures.
- They were having lawsuits brought against them, losing their property, being put in jail and some even losing their lives.

It is in the face of these tough trials that James writes this letter and encourages them to live out their faith. Evidently some were being tempted to compromise their faith.

James is writing to all of us this morning. He is encouraging us to live out our faith in our tough times in 2020. The test or challenge is to be genuine through and through with our faith no matter what we are facing.

In other words, he is saying if you truly are a follower of Jesus, it will make a difference in every area of your life.

James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. NIV

1. Jesus helps us find hope, joy and perseverance in tough times.

KIDS: Write or draw things you struggle with. What is hard or makes you sad? What do you need Jesus to help you with?

As followers of Jesus we have a faith that **helps us and informs us.** We know he is with us and for us. We know that God will take any situation and bring good out of it. **We know he always has a plan.**

- We have these promises to hold on to. They give us hope and strength to persevere when things look hopeless.

Joy comes out of our relationship with Jesus, not our circumstances. It is a fruit of his Spirit deep inside of me that gives me hope and the ability to see the positive in the negative.

Sometimes after listening to someone who is going through a tough time, I ask them this question. “*What is God doing in your life through this trial? What are you learning?*” – **That is my question to you right now...What is He teaching you?**

- *For me it is a new level of trust. So many things feel out of control*

In every trial there are things God wants to say and do in our lives. We don't want to miss the opportunity to grow and become mature. James says if we will choose joy, we will find persevering strength to face our challenges.

That is the difference Jesus makes in our life. While others are falling to pieces and overcome with fear, we have joy and hope for tomorrow.

KIDS: *Write or draw things that bring you joy. Make you happy.*

James 1:5-8 **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. But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.**

2. Jesus gives us wisdom to face our problems and overcome them.

While some people are fearful and getting all mad. Jesus invites us to come and ask for wisdom.

Wisdom to know what to do. Wisdom for your business, your schooling, your finances, your health, your future.

God eagerly gives his children guidance and direction. Ask him what you should do. God is very creative with many options. Trust God to guide you with his wisdom and then take a step of faith. Don't keep second guessing yourself or God.

God's wisdom produces faith in us. I feel the faith of God's people has been undermined through this pandemic. Yes, we need to take this virus seriously. It is especially dangerous to those in high risk groups, who we encourage to stay home.

- But at the same time there has been a lot of media induced fear.

We serve a God who saves and heals diseases. We serve a God who is bigger than any pandemic. We serve a God who protects and helps us in our time of need.

James continues in verses 13-18 by telling us it is **wrong to get mad at God and blame him for our troubles and tragedies.** God doesn't bring evil or bad things into our lives. The devil is the one we should get mad at. He is the one who kills, steals, and destroys. God brings good things.

James 1:19-27 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. 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.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

3. Jesus helps us watch what we say, live what we say, and care for others.

I have discovered that the frustration level and stress level is running pretty high in my life these past several months. The admonition from James to be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry is really good advice for us Jesus followers.

I have started praying this prayer every morning. ***“Lord let the words of my mouth be pleasing to you and encouraging to others today.”*** This includes what I put on social media. I need his help to be slow to speak and sometimes not to speak.

During this time of racial tension in our country God is teaching us to learn to listen to the perspective and experiences of those different than us. Not be so quick to judge until we have walked a lifetime in their shoes.

- I need to listen to the pain and fear of my black brothers and sisters.

The difference Jesus makes in our lives is he helps us to repent. He renews our minds, so we become peacemakers and begin to think like Jesus. He helps us build bridges and reconcile people. He helps us to love and be kind. To respect and value all people equally.

Jesus helps us live out our faith. I don't want to be a hypocrite which is saying one thing but doing the opposite. I want to live what I say – Practice what I preach.

This includes living a pure life. James calls it keeping ourselves from being polluted by the world.

- During this pandemic some people have let down their guard and used the pandemic as an excuse to abuse alcohol and get into pornography. Some took out their frustrations on their family and became abusive.
- It's time to repent and get back on track with living our faith and allowing Jesus to be the difference maker in our lives.

James ends this chapter by saying Jesus helps us love those around us. James says genuine Christianity cares for the orphans and widows. Jesus says to love our neighbor as ourselves.

- We have opportunities right now to help people around us
- Some are struggling financially
- Some are struggling with mental health issues – depressed, isolated and discouraged, some suicidal and feeling hopeless.
- Some for various reasons do not feel comfortable attending our services yet. Some need to be wearing masks as they venture out. They need our understanding and support. Let's be kind.

Reach out this week to someone that needs a touch of Jesus through you.

- Be the Jesus difference in their lives this week.
- Let's let our lights shine – so people will want Jesus to make a difference in their lives as well.

Is Jesus your difference maker this morning? Have you surrendered your life to Jesus? Is he Lord of your life? Your thoughts, your mouth, your actions?

- Ask Jesus to come into your life and take control. Ask him to forgive you and give you a new beginning.

Closing Prayer Blessing

May God bless you:

- With an inner joy as you face trials of many kinds
- May he grant you wisdom and an unwavering faith
- May your life be a living reflection of Jesus
- Allow Jesus to be your difference maker this week