

Season 2, Episode 1: James: Grace that shapes all of life

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Felicity: Hello. Hello. Welcome to the second season of Two Sisters and a cup of Tea. I'm Felicity and I live in America.

Sarah: And I'm Sarah. And I live in the UK. Felicity, tell us, what have you got in your mug today?

Felicity: Well, today actually straightforward Yorkshire tea. For those of you who were listening to the first season, you'd know that I do love the thing that I've named Yorkshire Gray, but we're actually recording this in the morning and I do prefer Yorkshire tea in the morning rather than the Yorkshire grade. But really my excitement this morning is that I have acquired in America a chocolate digestive biscuit. It's a big deal. I picked it up probably two months ago. Not the single biscuit, the packet. I'm a little concerned, though, because it says on the packet, milk chocolate flavored topping. Do you think when it says flavored, you think, does that mean it's not real chocolate?

Sarah: It's like the fake icing that you get that isn't actually chocolate. It's like chocolate type or chocolate. Do the taste test right now. Well, I mean, how early in the morning is it for you? Because for me, it's not morning, so it's definitely chocolate time. But I'm getting the feeling that chocolate time is anytime for you, really?

Felicity: Well, we are just after Easter, so I feel like chocolate is still a part of most parts of the day, but it is 08:00 in the morning. It shouldn't be chocolate biscuit time, but sacrificially for the sake of this. Actually, it tastes pretty good.

Sarah: Yeah.

Felicity: A little different, but actually not too bad.

Sarah: Okay, good.

Felicity: Yeah. What about you?

Sarah: I've got a Yorkshire tea, actually, as well. I think Yorkshire tea goes at any time of day, really. Although, interestingly, I wouldn't drink it in the morning, so I take that back. It doesn't go anywhere. I don't drink any time.

Felicity: I don't think I knew that. All right, okay.

Sarah: Well, I've got a little bit of Easter egg to keep me going as well.

Felicity: Pushing that into the biscuit category all of a sudden.

Sarah: No, I'm not saying it's a biscuit.

Felicity: Just snack to go with hot drink. Fair enough.

Sarah: Just my chocolate to go with my hot drink. Yeah. It's really nice to chat to you again like this. We've missed it. I've really missed it. What's weird is that I do talk about you at most meals because you gave us some caterpillars, you gave our kids some caterpillars since we last did this podcast and we named them after your family, so they all have one of your family names. And so we talk about you every meal because the Casper sit in the middle of our table, but we talk about the Caspers that are called your name.

Felicity: I was going to say, like, the caterpillar seems to be taking the place of any conversation that might actually be about us.

Sarah: It's all about how fast you're growing. Anyway, on a different note, we are getting stuck into the book of James this time, aren't we? And we're excited for it. And daunted as well. Tell everyone who's listening, how has it felt reading James for you in the last few weeks?

Felicity: Yes. Now. I am really excited to be reading James with you and talking about it. Because I think that when I have read James on my own previously. I have felt it's one of those ones where you feel a bit kind of challenged all the time is that a body blows all the way through the letter. Which is like.

Sarah: Oh.

Felicity: I'm not doing that. I'm not doing that. It's just like a series of, this is what it is to live as a Christian. And you know what? I'm not really doing it very well. So it can feel, I think, and it has felt a bit like a bit defeating to read it. And when we talked about doing it, we both said to each other, this is going to be hard, isn't it? Because how do you read James and not just have that sort of feeling that you've just been in a rugby match or an American football match for that length of time? So I went into it feeling like, oh, it's going to feel a bit like that, and it did feel like that. And I have been challenged by it. And I think in our conversations, we've kind of highlighted those challenges. So there is hope in the midst of it, which I think the more times I've read it, I have kind of gleaned the hope, seen the hope, seen the Jesus more and more. What about you, Sarah?

Sarah: Yeah, I think similarly, I found it pretty hard to read it. What's really been good for me, actually, is that I've listened to David Cusher reading it to me on my school runs and he's got a nice voice, so I like listening to him and it feels it's just been lovely accompanying me to school. It back and it's really helpful hearing someone read it to me over and over again as I've been listening it through. And partly what's really helped me in that is that it's helped me to see the repetition of what's been going on through the letter. And what James does through the letter is that nearly in every paragraph, he starts, my dear brothers and sisters, my dear brothers and sisters, this is a really pastoral letter. He really cares for the people he's working to. And actually, I don't think I kind of got that before, having listened to it that many times and listened to David Cushy telling me, my dear brothers and sisters. It's a great version to listen to, by the way. We'll link it on the show notes, but it's the Nav audio Bible and I really like it.

Felicity: Yeah, I agree.

Sarah: Actually.

Felicity: I have been having his voice in my head as well, so we didn't talk about that before. David Sushi is a part of this podcast. Why don't you just help us? So the brothers and sisters saying it's a pastoral letter, as in pastoral, he is speaking to Christians. So can you just help us think through a bit of the context of the letter?

Sarah: Yeah, the first verse, and we're not going to go through any of the verses really, today. We're just going to give you a little bit of an introduction, aren't we? But the first verse of James says James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ to the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. This letter is written by James. James is actually the half brother of Jesus. And so he grew up listening to Jesus, listening to the perfect man, the God who became man, saying amazing things, doing amazing things, and then dying an amazing, extraordinary death and rising again. This is James who has lived and breathed alongside Jesus. But he doesn't pick himself up, does he? He says, a servant of God. Another Lord, Jesus Christ. So he doesn't start by saying, I am his half brother. Listen to me. He starts by saying, I'm a servant and I'm a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he is here to serve. And who is he serving? He's serving the twelve tribes scattered among the nations. And so James is actually a leader of the big church in Jerusalem. That church was dispersed and scattered by the Jewish leaders who were opposed to Christians gathering. And you can read about that back in the Acts chapter eight. These people are now scattered across the nation, believers already in the gospel. So James is writing to people who have already trusted in Jesus. He is assuming that his readers are believers. They know the good news, they know that Jesus has died once and for all for their sin. They know that he rose again and they know that they are waiting for Jesus to return. So these are people who already trust in Jesus and are living in light of that message. But the extraordinary thing about this letter is that not once do we get a description of the cross or the resurrection. It's really quite surprising. And when we read other letters, we read Paul's letters and it's everywhere, isn't it? Consistently, he kind of talks about this, he goes back to the cross, he goes to the resurrection a load of times and to back up his points. But in James he doesn't, he assumes you know it, but just because he doesn't mention the cross, it doesn't mean that it's not there throughout the letter. It is signs of the cross, signs of living in life, of this grace are there throughout it. And I wonder whether first, you can just help us understand a bit of what it looks like in James language.

Felicity: Yeah, I think that's the thing, isn't it? Because it is a surprise. And when you're reading it, I wonder whether that's partly why we feel the kind of the body blows as we read it, because we're kind of more used to reading the Paul letters where he's just quite clear that this is the cross, this is where we need to put our hope. Jesus, Jesus. And James does do it, but just in different language, in different ways. And actually there are two big kind of moments of grace or grace springs. Sarah and I have been kind of calling it that. Then there are two big moments. But then actually, the whole letter is underpinned by these things. So if you just have a quick look at chapter one, verses 16 through to 18, he talks about God the Father, the head of the heavenly lights, the unchanging God. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of first roots of all he created. And that word of truth that we have been given birth through, that word of truth, that is the means by which we have grace. So in James language, because then he goes on to say a similar thing later on, he says, humbly accept the word planted in you which can save you. And I think that word that he's talking about is Jesus, is the Gospel, is the cross, is all those things kind of packed into this one reference. So all the way through the letter, we're being called back to that word of truth. And if you were to flick on to chapter four, you'd see the same kind of idea that as we then we see the Word of truth, we actually, as we see the law, we see God's call to us in how we live, which we then fall short of. But then as we see that we fall short of it, we then can come to chapter four, verse eight. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners. Prayer for our hearts, you don't mind grieve mourn and well humble yourselves before the Lord and he will lift you up. And all the way through James, we seem to have the grace that comes through humility. So as we see through all those body blows, all the challenges, we see how far we fall short. We love that we have the word of Truth through which we're saved. And as we have that, we know that we can humbly come to God and he will lift us up. And I think that all the way through the letter, we see little moments where God lifts us up. And at the very start, actually, back in chapter one, James says, those who are lacking can ask God for wisdom. And ultimately that's what it is, wisdom. In order that we might know the word of truth that we have, know that we can come to God and he'll come near to us and he'll lift us up. So it's kind of different language, but it's very much still there. And I think that as you read the letter again and again and again, you see it kind of seeping through more and more each time. So it's wonderfully hopeful.

Sarah: That's really helpful. Christie and I think there's a bigger picture of what grace looks like in this letter in terms of actually what James puts forward is actually a vision of living the Christian life, where he says the perfect law that gives freedom. But to live the law of God, to live out the call to love God and love our neighbor, is actually a freeing thing. It is a good thing and it is a wonderful thing to strive towards. And he's desperately wanting these believers to see the precious nature of living in light of God's grace and how it impacts the whole of life. And the last verse of the letter, really, you've got the passion about this all the way through, and it comes to an end. The last verse of the letter, he says, My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the priest and someone should bring that person back, remember this whoever turns the sinner from the air of their way will save them from death and cover over a multitude of sins. He desperately does not want these believers who are stuck in having different trials, different temptations all over the place. He does not want them to wander away from the truth. And all the way through the letter, he's warning them, isn't he? There's a ton of warnings not to be double minded, not to have 1ft in being a believer of the Lord Jesus, but also, I'm just going to have 1ft hedging my bets in the world, just in case this life doesn't quite pan out in the way that I want it to. Would you say that?

Felicity: Yeah, I think that's right, isn't it? So the doublemindedness that he talks about from the very start, he says, don't be double minded. Like, seek God fully, truly run to him, trusting that he is God. And I think actually in that trusting that the word of truth is the thing that saves you, the law is good, trusting God's perspective on the world. So doublemindedness which seems to be running through the letter as the root cause of why we might wander away from the truth. And as you say, that foot in both camps. We've talked about that a fair bit, haven't we, what it is to kind of be trusting God, but also just having a little backup plan as well, and actually kind of trying to do the splits a bit between

Godly ways and worldly ways. And that's where you fall down. I think that's James' kind of like big warning, like, don't do that. That's where you're going to fall down. Come back to the word humbly, accept the word of truth, God's way.

Sarah: And that's kind of yeah, I think his drive on our hearts in this is that actually wandering away from the truth doesn't often look dramatic. It starts with being double minded and just thinking, well, I'm just going to hold on to the world's way, as well as God's way. I'm just going to hold on to God and my money, or the way that I speak to someone or how I treat someone like this, like the world might be. But slowly and slowly and slowly that becomes more normal and that can lead to wandering away completely from the trees. I was going to say gently, sometimes it's not gentle in this lesson, but he is a pastor at heart and he's wanting to warn his questions around the world to keep holding fast, keep standing firm, keep steadfast to the truth that you have already planted in you. And I think what's really encouraging about this and what we've been dwelling on more recently, as we've been talking about this together, is that actually this is a community thing, isn't it? His command at the end of the letter is if you see someone who's wandering away, bring them back. So I think it's not only there's a challenge, the big challenge in our hearts is, are we wondering, are we being double minded? But also, do I know someone who is and how can I help them to come back to Jesus?

Felicity: Yeah, we've realized that just as we've been talking in preparation for this, there's been a real kind of as we've seen our own hearts and talked about it and talked about the truth. It's been a wonderful thing to see, actually. God is working through this letter as we talk about it together. I think we were saying, we'd love to encourage you as listeners to be talking about this letter with others. And actually, we're thinking that with our show notes every week, we're going to have some questions which will help you to talk about it with others. We really think that the best thing to be doing as you listen to this is to be in community with others doing this. So we're going to, in our show notes, have questions each week that will help you get the conversation going and to help us as a kind of community, I guess, grow as we listen and read James together.

Sarah: Yeah, definitely. So if you know someone who you think you'd like to study James with, maybe they live far away, maybe live in next door street, whatever, give them a call this week, asked them to listen to this first episode and say, why not? Why don't we listen to this together? We encourage you to do this with someone else. Have a cup of tea with another sit down whether you can see them in the flesh or not over them or whatever else it is, sit down with them and enjoy doing it together. And we'd love others to be getting a hold of this and starting the season with us. And we'd love you to give us a review on itunes if you can. And that just helps people to get the word out that our new season is starting and kicking off so that people start at the beginning of the season with us and can do that in real time as well. But we need to wrap up. Felicity, would you like to pray for us as we closely?

Felicity: Sure. Okay, let's pray. Father, we thank you so much for the letter of James. Thank you for how you are at work through your word. And we pray that as we start this new season, as we go through the letter of James together, would you show us our hearts, but also show us the word that's implanted in us? Would we be those who humbly accept your word? And so would we be those who persevere, who are steadfast in choosing your way. Lord, pray that you'd really be with us as we go through this letter over these coming weeks, and we pray all this in your name. Amen.

Sarah: Amen.

Felicity: It's been a joy, Sarah, to be back together.

Sarah: It's so good, isn't it? I know. Can you believe it? We're edging on two years of not seeing each other in the flesh, which feels very painful, but all the more better when we see each other like this over a cup of tea.

Felicity: Absolutely. So thank you, everyone, for listening along. We're so excited to be digging into James with you. And as Sarah said, do leave a review if you can tell others about it. Let's get the community reading together as we read James. So we'll see you hear you. You'll hear us next time.

Sarah: Yeah. All right. Take care, everyone.

Felicity: Bye bye.

Sarah: Bye. Thanks so much for listening to this latest episode of Two Sisters in a cup of Tea. This podcast is sponsored by Tennis Do. Go and check them out now afteracathase@tenorbose.com.