HOPE CHAPEL | GAWLER | GUEST SPEAKER

A GOSPEL-COMPELLED REACTION

Christian community isn't an empty religious action. It's a gospel-compelled reaction.

James Murray | Sunday 11 October 2026 | 9AM Gawler | Ephesians 2

Big Idea: *When the gospel truly hits your heart, gathering together is not an obligation you fulfil or a box you tick. It is a reaction you cannot contain. We are not here to bunker down from the darkness - we are here to overwhelm it.*

About James Murray

James Murray is a pastor from Sydney who travels and speaks in churches across Australia. He brought this message to Hope Chapel Gawler on 11 October 2026.

James has been married for 24 years to his wife Alana, who he met in high school. They have four children - a 19-year-old son, twin 14-year-old girls, and a 7-year-old son. He opened the morning with warmth, humour, and a genuine encouragement to the congregation to pray for and support their pastors.

Foundation - Ephesians 2:1–9

James opened in Ephesians 2, laying the gospel as the foundation for everything that followed:

> **Ephesians 2:4–5** *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ - by grace you have been saved.*

Two words that James said he loves: but God. It is the great turning point of the gospel. Not because of what we did or deserved, but because of who he is.

One preacher put it this way: Jesus didn't come to make bad people good. He came to make dead people live. The gospel is not a moral improvement program. It is resurrection.

God did not stand at the top of the moral staircase shouting down, do better, try harder to get to me. He met us on the bottom step and said: it is finished.

This matters because it levels everything. No one earns their way to God. No one arrives more worthy than anyone else. We all receive the same grace, at the same foot of the same

cross. And when that truth genuinely gets into your heart, it does something. It produces a reaction.

THE BIG POINT | Christian Community Is a Gospel-Compelled Reaction

James said he always aims to give one clear focal point. Here it is: Christian community is not an empty religious action. It is a gospel-compelled reaction. What we are doing when we gather is not performance or obligation. We are reacting to something that has already taken place.

Think of Coke and Mentos. When those two things interact, you cannot contain what happens. The reaction happens whether you plan it or not. That is what the gospel does to a human heart. When it truly lands there, community and worship and mission are not things you do because you have to. They are what comes out.

The Danger of Drift

James addressed what he called the greatest threat to the church in the West - and said it is not persecution. It is drift. The slow exchange of life-giving faith for familiar routines.

> *The devil can't stop the church. Jesus said it himself: the gates of hell will not prevail against it. But what the enemy tries to do is sedate the church by luring it into a life of motion without meaning.*

James was clear: religion is not a style of church. It is a state of the heart. You can have screens, great music, all the right elements on a Sunday morning, and still be drifting into empty religion. Motion without meaning.

How Do You Know If You've Drifted?

James named four patterns that signal drift has taken hold:

Attendance replaces engagement. You show up but you're not really there. The body is present, the heart has checked out.

Familiarity replaces wonder. What once moved you has become ordinary. The same truths, the same songs, the same gathering - and nothing stirs.

Performance replaces presence. You go through the right motions on a Sunday but it has become a thing to present rather than a place to encounter God.

Comfort replaces mission. The gathering becomes about what you receive rather than what you are sent out to do.

James said honestly: I have let my own heart drift. I have come into a Sunday and thought, just another worship set, just another time around the Word. The issue is not whether it happens. The issue is whether we come back to what this was always meant to be about.

Reflect: *Which of those four patterns have you noticed in yourself recently? Attendance without engagement, familiarity without wonder, performance instead of presence, or comfort instead of mission?*

POINT 1 | Church Community Requires Context

James jumped to Ephesians 2:19–22, and said that before you can understand what the church is meant to do, you need to understand what it is meant to be:

> **Ephesians 2:19–22** *Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

The word Paul uses is ekklesia - often translated as church, but literally meaning called-out ones. We are people who have been called out of one way of living and into another. Matthew 5 describes this community as a city on a hill that cannot be hidden. The design was never to stay hidden.

Not a Bunker - an Army

James described two very different pictures of what the church can look like. The first is a bunker - people retreating underground during the Blitz, riding out the bombing, waiting for the danger to pass. He said this is how many people think about church: a shelter from a world that is getting darker, a place to gather with like-minded people and endure until things get better.

The gospel does not compel retreat. The gospel compels advance.

> *James used the image of Gandalf arriving at Helm's Deep in The Two Towers: not barricading the fortress, but riding out to overwhelm the darkness. That is the church. Not here to bunker down. Here to advance the light into everything the darkness has claimed.*

George Eldon Ladd framed it theologically: the kingdom of God has invaded history in advance of its final consummation. The church lives between the already and the not yet. The kingdom is here - Jesus announced it, died for it, rose to inaugurate it - and we are the continuation of that story.

> **Matthew 4:17** *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.*

That was the number one message Jesus preached. Not just individual salvation, but the in-breaking of a new kingdom - an invasion of heaven into earth. And the church is the ongoing expression of that kingdom on the move.

We are to be continued. The kingdom story Jesus started is not finished. You and I are the next chapter.

James challenged what he called the modern evangelical gospel shortcut: life before Jesus was a life of self and sin, then I got saved, and now I endure the world until heaven. He said the problem is not with getting people saved - of course that matters. The problem is when salvation becomes the finish line rather than the starting line.

Reflect: *How do you personally picture the church's role in the world - more like a bunker, or more like Helm's Deep? What would it look like for you to shift from enduring the world to advancing into it?*

Why Sunday?

James made a point that often gets missed: Jesus never commanded his followers to gather on a Sunday. The Great Commission was a command. Loving one another was a command. But the weekly gathering was never an obligation in the same way.

So why did the early church gather every single week without fail? Because Sunday was the day Jesus rose from the grave. And every week they wanted to be reminded: his power came. Everything changed. Death was defeated. And we are now a part of his kingdom plan to renew all things.

Sunday is not a religious duty. It is a weekly declaration that the resurrection happened - and that we are still living in its wake.

James said we come for two things: to bring worship, and to be reminded. Not to experience worship as a spectator - but to give it, as a response to everything God has done. And to be reminded, week after week, of what we are actually a part of.

Reflect: *When you walked in this morning, what were you bringing? Gratitude, questions, tiredness, hope? And what do you need to be reminded of today?*

Reflection & Discussion Questions

Use these on your own during the week, or with your LifeGroup.

1. James said the greatest threat to the church in the West is not persecution - it's drift. Where do you see drift happening in your own faith life? What has become motion without meaning?

2. The gospel-compelled reaction: when the gospel truly hits your heart, community and worship and mission are not obligations but reactions. How much of your engagement with church right now feels like reaction, and how much feels like obligation?

3. James described two pictures of the church - a bunker and an army advancing on darkness. Which picture is more true of how you have been living your faith this season?

4. The early church gathered every Sunday not because they were commanded to, but because Sunday was the day of the resurrection and they wanted to be reminded. What does it do to your posture when you think of gathering that way - as a weekly declaration, not a duty?

5. James said we come to bring worship, not just experience it. What would it mean practically for you to come next Sunday as someone bringing something, rather than arriving to receive?

6. The St. Peter's Basilica story: a building that started as a place meant to welcome people in, and ended up keeping people out. Where in your own Christian life have things drifted from welcome and mission toward comfort and familiarity?

Key Scriptures This Week

- Ephesians 2:4–5 - But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us - made us alive together with Christ
- Ephesians 2:19–22 - You are no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God
- Matthew 4:17 - Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near
- Matthew 5:14 - You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden
- Matthew 28:18–20 - The Great Commission - go and make disciples of all nations
- Hebrews 10:24–25 - Do not give up meeting together - but encourage one another