

NOON BIBLE STUDY: JAMES 2 (PT. 2)

JAMES, WRITING TO THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY SCATTERED AROUND THE REGION, IS TEACHING AND REMINDING THE BELIEVERS WHAT IT MEANS TO BE THE PEOPLE OF JESUS IN THEIR DAILY LIVES. HE IS OUTLINING A NEW WAY OF LIVING, DISTINCT FROM THEIR FORMER LIVES WHETHER AS DEVOUT JEWS OR DEVOUT PAGANS. HIS MESSAGE IS FOR THE CHRISTIANS OF TODAY AS WELL. HE'S CALLED US TO LIVE A TRULY RELIGIOUS LIFE: TEMPTATION OVERCOMERS, HEARERS AND DOERS, WITH CARE FOR THOSE IN NEED, WITH A MORAL PURITY, WITHOUT FAVORITISM. HE'S TURNING NOW TOWARDS A MORE THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT FOR THE NECESSITY OF THIS NEW LIFE. HIS MAIN POINT OF THIS SECTION: THOSE WHO HAVE FAITH SHOW THEIR FAITH BY THEIR ACTIONS.

JAMES 2:14-26

JAMES 2:14 - FAITH BUT NO WORKS?

JAMES IMPLIES THAT FAITH IS WHAT IS NECESSARY FOR SALVATION. THIS IS CONGRUENT WITH WHAT PAUL TAUGHT AS WELL. OFTEN TIMES SKEPTICS WILL HIGHLIGHT AN ALLEGED CONTRADICTION BETWEEN PAUL AND JAMES, TYPICALLY LEADING TO THE MINIMIZING OF JAMES WORK. PAUL WROTE THE FOLLOWING:

EPHESIANS 2:8-9 - FOR BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH; AND THAT NOT OF YOURSELVES, IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD; 9 NOT AS A RESULT OF WORKS, SO THAT NO ONE MAY BOAST.

JAMES WROTE THAT "FAITH SAVES" AS WELL (V. 14). THE CONVERSATION JAMES HAS IN HIS LETTER IS NOT WHETHER OR NOT FAITH SAVES, BUT WHAT *LIVING* FAITH IS ALL ABOUT. HIS WORK GETS THE FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST TO CONSIDER THE END RESULT OF FAITH → A LIFE THAT IS IMPACTED BY THAT FAITH TO THE POINT OF ACTION. AND THIS WAS PAUL'S DESIRE AS WELL. THE VERSE NEXT VERSE AFTER THE FAMOUS "BY GRACE YOU ARE SAVED THROUGH FAITH..." IS THIS:

EPHESIANS 2:10 - FOR WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS FOR GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED BEFOREHAND SO THAT WE WOULD WALK IN THEM.

OUR STUDY HERE IS ON THE BOOK OF JAMES. WE ARE LOOKING AT HIS LETTER, TRYING TO RECEIVE AND INTERPRET IT AS THE FIRST CHRISTIANS WOULD HAVE. WITH THIS IN MIND, WE WON'T SPEND A BUNCH OF TIME WORKING TO CORRELATE THESE TWO EARLY CHURCH LEADERS, BUT IT'S IMPORTANT FOR US TO REALIZE THAT JAMES AND PAUL ARE BOTH INSPIRED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THEIR WORKS PROVIDE NEEDED EMPHASIS ON VARIOUS THINGS THAT CHRISTIANS NEED TO UNDERSTAND AND EMBRACE. JUST BECAUSE SOMEONE EMPHASIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE DOESN'T MEAN THEY DON'T BELIEVE IN JUSTICE. YOU CAN'T SAY EVERYTHING YOU BELIEVE ALL THE TIME, NOR IS IT AN EFFECTIVE RHETORICAL METHOD TO CONSTANTLY QUALIFY WHAT YOU MEAN OR SAY TO SATISFY THE SKEPTICS. JAMES BELIEVES IN (AND WILL TEACH) THE CENTRALITY OF FAITH TO "SAVE" US AND CALLS CHRISTIANS TO LIVE (WORKS) IN LIGHT OF THEIR FAITH. HE WILL EMPHASIZE AND HIGHLIGHT WHAT HE BELIEVES THE LORD IS LEADING HIM TO EMPHASIZE AND HIGHLIGHT BASED ON THE NEED OF HIS SPECIFIC AUDIENCE.

PAUL WILL DO THE EXACT SAME THING.

JAMES 2:15-17 - AN EXAMPLE

HAVING THE SENTIMENT TO HELP SOMEONE IN NEED IS IMPORTANT, FOR WITHOUT THE MENTAL OR EMOTIONAL CONCERN, NO ACTION TO HELP WILL FOLLOW. HOWEVER, SIMPLY HAVING THE EMPATHY OR THOUGHT TO HELP WITHOUT ACTUALLY HELPING MAKES THE INITIAL THOUGHT NO MORE THAN WISHFUL THINKING. THE END GOAL OF HAVING COMPASSION ON THE BROTHER OR SISTER IN NEED IS HELPING TO ACTUALLY ALLEVIATE THEIR NEED.

IN THE SAME WAY HAVING "FAITH" (A BELIEF IN/OF, A TRUST IN GOD, A MENTAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF TRUTH) WITHOUT THAT FAITH AFFECTING YOUR LIFE AT ALL IS WHAT JAMES WILL CALL "DEAD FAITH". DEAD FAITH ISN'T SAVING FAITH.

SO DOES THIS MEAN WE ARE SAVED BY THE WORKS THAT WE DO? NO, WE ARE SAVED BY THE WORK GOD DID THROUGH JESUS CHRIST...BUT THE EVIDENCE OF THAT UNSEEN, NON VISIBLE "FAITH" IS ACTION IN LIGHT OF THAT FAITH.

JAMES 2:18

DO YOU THINK SOME PEOPLE HAVE FAITH AND SOME PEOPLE HAVE WORKS?

JAMES USES A COMMON LITERARY STYLE OF PRESUPPOSING THE QUESTIONS OF HIS OPPONENTS AND ADDRESSING THEIR ARGUMENTS BEFORE THEY HAVE A CHANCE TO RESPOND. APPARENTLY HE ANTICIPATED THAT SOME OF HIS DAY MIGHT ARGUE THAT "SOME PEOPLE HAVE FAITH, OTHERS HAVE GOOD DEEDS" (NLT). JAMES RESPONDS:

JAMES 2:18B - BUT I SAY, "HOW CAN YOU SHOW ME YOUR FAITH IF YOU DON'T HAVE GOOD DEEDS? I WILL SHOW YOU MY FAITH BY MY GOOD DEEDS."

HOW ELSE CAN YOU SHOW YOU HAVE FAITH? IF YOU ARGUE THAT YOU HAVE FAITH AND OTHERS HAVE GOOD DEEDS, HOW CAN YOU PROVE THAT YOU ARE ONE OF THE ONES WHO HAS FAITH BUT *NOT* GOOD DEEDS? YOU CAN'T!

ONE OF THE COMMON ARGUMENTS OF OUR TIME IS SIMILAR. THERE ARE CHRISTIANS, ESPECIALLY IN THE UNITED STATES, WHO SPEAK OF THEIR FAITH AS "PRIVATE." WHILE OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND CHRIST IS CERTAINLY PERSONAL, SCRIPTURE DOES NOT INDICATE THAT IT IS PRIVATE (READ: SECRET). JESUS SAID HIS FOLLOWERS WOULD BE KNOWN BY THEIR LOVE (JOHN 13:34-35) AND THAT THEY WERE CALLED TO BE A LIGHT TO THE WORLD, COMPARABLE TO A CITY SET ON A HILL (MATTHEW 5:14-15) AND CONCLUDES HIS POINT BY CALLING US TO:

"LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE BEFORE MEN IN SUCH A WAY THAT THEY MAY SEE YOUR GOOD WORKS, AND GLORIFY YOUR FATHER WHO IS IN HEAVEN. (MATTHEW 5:16)

OTHER CONCERNING TRENDS RELATED TO THIS ARE THE "ONCE SAVED ALWAYS SAVED" THEOLOGY WHICH TEACHES THAT AFTER A ONE-TIME VERBAL CONFESSION OF "JESUS AS LORD" OR PRAYING THE OFTEN NEBULOUS "SINNER'S PRAYER" SOMEONE IS ETERNALLY SAVED REGARDLESS OF ANY RESPONSE TO THIS BRIEF MOMENT OF...FAITH(?). WHETHER YOU ROB A BANK, MURDER 25 PEOPLE OR CONVERT TO ISLAM, YOU'RE SAVED. WHILE THE FATHER'S INTENTION IS THAT THOSE WHO ARE TRULY SAVED ARE "ONCE SAVED, ALWAYS SAVED..." THIS ISN'T WHAT SCRIPTURE MEANS.

LASTLY, THERE ARE OTHERS WHO EMPHASIZE WORKS IN A DISPROPORTIONATE WAY. THEY FEAR THAT ONE POINT OF DISOBEDIENCE OR SIN CAUSES YOU TO LOSE YOUR SALVATION. SOME HAVE EVEN RETURNED TO ADHERENCE TO THE MOSAIC LAWS AS A WAY TO BE MADE RIGHT WITH GOD. WHILE THIS IS A MINORITY VIEW, IT CAN BE JUST AS EXTREME AS THE PERSPECTIVES WE HIGHLIGHTED ABOVE.

JAMES 2:19-20 - THE DEMONS GET IT, DO THE CHRISTIANS?

THE BELIEF IN ONE GOD IS THE CORNERSTONE OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH (BUILT UPON THAT FOUNDATION LAID IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, JEWISH FAITH). THE FOREMOST CREED OF JUDAISM, EVEN CITED IN JESUS' DAY WAS "THE LORD (YHWH) OUR GOD IS ONE" (DEUTERONOMY 6:4, MARK 12:29). ESPECIALLY IN THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE FIRST CENTURY (THE GREEK/ROMAN WORLD WAS FILLED WITH DEITIES), THE CHRISTIAN'S MONOTHEISM WAS A DISTINCT CHARACTERISTIC. AS PAUL BRINGS THE GOSPEL TO THIS WORLD, HE WILL OFTEN REITERATE AND HIGHLIGHT THIS TRUTH:

EPHESIANS 4:6 - ONE GOD AND FATHER OF ALL WHO IS OVER ALL AND THROUGH ALL AND IN ALL.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:4 - THEREFORE CONCERNING THE EATING OF THINGS SACRIFICED TO IDOLS, WE KNOW THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS AN IDOL IN THE WORLD, AND THAT THERE IS NO GOD BUT ONE.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:5-6A - FOR EVEN IF THERE ARE SO-CALLED GODS WHETHER IN HEAVEN OR ON EARTH, AS INDEED THERE ARE MANY GODS AND MANY LORDS, 6 YET FOR US THERE IS BUT ONE GOD, THE FATHER, FROM WHOM ARE ALL THINGS AND WE EXIST FOR HIM:

1 TIMOTHY 2:5A - FOR THERE IS ONE GOD...

TO BE A CHRISTIAN, ONE CONFESSED TO THIS TRUTH - THAT THERE IS ONLY ONE GOD AND THAT JESUS IS THE MESSIAH. HOWEVER, SOLELY A VERBAL AGREEMENT TO THIS TRUTH WITHOUT IT IMPACTING YOUR LIFE IS IN VAIN.

JAMES COMMENDS THE BELIEVER FOR THEIR CREEDAL CONFESSION IN VERSE 19 ("YOU BELIEVE THAT GOD IS ONE...YOU DO WELL!") BUT THEN IMMEDIATELY PIVOTS TO SAY "THE DEMONS ALSO BELIEVE" AND THIS TRUTH CAUSES THEM TO "TREMBLE IN FEAR!" (NET). CERTAINLY THE FOLLOWER OF CHRIST SHOULD HAVE A MORE VIBRANT FAITH THAN EVIL SPIRITS?! UNDERSTANDING THAT FAITH AND WORKS FLOW TOGETHER IS AN IMPORTANT REALITY TO EMBRACE. FOR "FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS *USELESS* (V. 20)."

JAMES 2:21-24 - EXHIBIT A: ABRAHAM

GENESIS 22 RECORDS A STRANGE BUT POWERFUL STORY OF THE LORD COMMANDING THE GREAT PATRIARCH ABRAHAM TO OFFER HIS ONLY SON AS A SACRIFICE TO GOD. THIS CHILD HAD BEEN GIVEN TO ABRAHAM IN HIS OLD AGE AFTER THE LORD COVENANTED WITH ABRAHAM TO MAKE HIM THE "FATHER OF MANY NATIONS (GENESIS 17:4-5)." INCREDIBLY, ABRAHAM TRAVELS TO MOUNT MORIAH TO OFFER UP ISAAC AND JUST AS HE IS ABOUT TO KILL HIM, THE LORD INTERVENES, COMMENDS ABRAHAM AND PROVIDES A RAM AS THE REAL SACRIFICE.

JAMES USES THIS STORY TO HIGHLIGHT THE POINT HE IS MAKING ABOUT FAITH AND WORKS. ABRAHAM, KNOWN AS THE "FATHER OF FAITH" AND THE LEADING EXAMPLE OF WHAT FAITH IS IN THE HEBREW SCRIPTURES IS INTENTIONALLY SELECTED BY JAMES TO MAKE THIS POINT.

ABRAHAM HAD FAITH. HIS FAITH INFLUENCED HIS THOUGHTS AND ACTIONS. WHEN ASKED BY GOD TO SACRIFICE HIS SON ISAAC, HE RESPONDED, IN FAITH. THE EVIDENCE OF HIS FAITH WAS "SEEN" BY THE FACT THAT ABRAHAM GOT UP AND WENT WITH ISAAC TO THE MOUNTAIN. JAMES SAYS HERE THAT HIS WORKS "JUSTIFIED" HIM. BUT IF YOU ASKED ABRAHAM ~~WHY~~ HE ACTED THE WAY HE DID, HE WOULD HAVE ANSWERED "BECAUSE I HAVE FAITH." HIS WORKS WERE THE OVERFLOW OF HIS FAITH, THE WAY YOU SAW THAT HE HAD FAITH. CONSIDER WHAT THE LORD SPOKE TO ABRAHAM IN THIS RECORD JUST AS ABRAHAM RAISED THE KNIFE OVER ISAAC:

GENESIS 22:9-12 - THEN THEY CAME TO THE PLACE OF WHICH GOD HAD TOLD HIM; AND ABRAHAM BUILT THE ALTAR THERE AND ARRANGED THE WOOD, AND BOUND HIS SON ISAAC AND LAID HIM ON THE ALTAR, ON TOP OF THE WOOD. 10 ABRAHAM STRETCHED OUT HIS HAND AND TOOK THE KNIFE TO SLAY HIS SON. 11 BUT THE ANGEL OF THE LORD CALLED TO HIM FROM HEAVEN AND SAID, "ABRAHAM, ABRAHAM!" AND HE SAID, "HERE I AM." 12 HE SAID, "DO NOT STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND AGAINST THE LAD, AND DO NOTHING TO HIM; FOR NOW I KNOW THAT YOU FEAR GOD, SINCE YOU HAVE NOT WITHHELD YOUR SON, YOUR ONLY SON, FROM ME."

YOU CAN'T "SEE" SOMEONE'S FEAR OF THE LORD - BUT YOU CAN SEE THE EVIDENCE OF THEIR FEAR OF HIM BY THEIR ACTIONS (OR LACK OF ACTIONS). IT IS THE SAME WITH FAITH.

JAMES 2:25 - EXHIBIT B: RAHAB

HERE JAMES GIVES US HIS SECOND OLD TESTAMENT EXAMPLE TO ILLUSTRATE HE ISN'T TEACHING ANYTHING NEW ABOUT THIS RELATIONSHIP WITH FAITH AND WORKS. RAHAB WAS THE HARLOT OF JERICO WHO HOUSED THE SPIES AS THE ISRAELITES MADE THEIR APPROACH IN THE PROMISED LAND. HERE IS WHAT RAHAB CONFESSED TO THE SPIES:

JOSHUA 2:8-11 - BEFORE THE SPIES WENT TO SLEEP THAT NIGHT, RAHAB WENT UP ON THE ROOF TO TALK WITH THEM. 9 "I KNOW THE LORD HAS GIVEN YOU THIS LAND," SHE TOLD THEM. "WE ARE ALL AFRAID OF YOU. EVERYONE IN THE LAND IS LIVING IN TERROR. 10 FOR WE HAVE HEARD HOW THE LORD MADE A DRY PATH FOR YOU THROUGH THE RED SEA WHEN YOU LEFT EGYPT. AND WE KNOW WHAT YOU DID TO SIHON AND OG, THE TWO AMORITE KINGS EAST OF THE JORDAN RIVER, WHOSE PEOPLE YOU COMPLETELY DESTROYED. 11 NO WONDER OUR HEARTS HAVE MELTED IN FEAR! NO ONE HAS THE COURAGE TO FIGHT AFTER HEARING SUCH THINGS. FOR THE LORD YOUR GOD IS THE SUPREME GOD OF THE HEAVENS ABOVE AND THE EARTH BELOW.

MANY OTHER PEOPLE IN THE CITY OF JERICO MAY HAVE AGREED WITH THESE FACTUAL STATEMENTS, BUT HOW DO WE KNOW THAT RAHAB ACTUALLY BELIEVED THESE THINGS ABOUT THE LORD? BECAUSE OF HOW SHE ACTED IN LIGHT OF THIS FAITH.

IF YOU HEAR NEWS THAT A TORNADO IS SPINNING TOWARDS YOUR HOME IN THE NEXT 30 MINUTES, EVIDENCE THAT YOU BELIEVE (HAVE FAITH IN) THIS NEWS IS THAT YOU GET IN THE CAR AND DRIVE AS FAST AS YOU CAN IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION. YOUR BELIEF IN THE NEWS THAT THE TORNADO IS CLOSE IS ULTIMATE WHAT LEADS TO YOUR SALVATION FROM IT, BUT YOUR ACTIONS TO GET IN THE CAR TO DRIVE AWAY SEAL THAT DEAL. BELIEVING THE TORNADO IS COMING AND SITTING ON THE COUCH PONDERING, MEDITATING OR EVEN MENTIONING IT TO SOMEONE ELSE IS IN VAIN IF YOU DON'T FLEE.

JAMES 2:26 - FAITH WITHOUT WORKS IS DEAD

CAN YOU HAVE A DEAD BODY? YES. CAN YOU HAVE FAITH THAT IS DEAD? YES, IF IT DOES NOT HAVE WORKS/ACTIONS WHICH FLOW FROM IT. JAMES CONCLUDES THIS CHAPTER WITH THIS POWERFUL FIGURE AND MINDPICTURE TO ILLUSTRATE HIS MAIN POINT. FAITH WITHOUT CORRESPONDING WORKS IS USELESS, POINTLESS, AND DEAD.

PERHAPS JAMES 2:14-26 BRINGS GREAT CLARITY TO QUESTIONS YOU'VE HAD. PERHAPS IT CONFIRMS YOU'RE ON THE RIGHT TRACK. OR PERHAPS THESE WORDS ARE CHALLENGING TO HEAR. IF SO, IT MIGHT BE GOOD FOR US TO CONSIDER WHY. THE FOUNDATION OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD NEEDS TO BE ROOTED IN JUST THAT, A RELATIONSHIP. WHEN WE GET THE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, WHICH IS BASED ON LOVE, RIGHT, WE CAN GET THE "FAITH AND WORKS" STUFF RIGHT TOO.

HERE'S WHAT I MEAN. I LOVE MY WIFE. THAT IS PRIMARILY AN EMOTIONAL THING, A "FEELING." BUT MY LOVE IS SHOWN, PROVEN AND VERIFIED BY THE WAY I ACT TOWARDS HER. WHAT AND HOW I SPEAK, WHAT I DO/DON'T DO. MY WIFE WILL THEN "FEEL" MY LOVE. SHE WILL KNOW IT IS MORE THAN JUST LIP-SERVICE, BUT REAL AND GENUINE. FOR ME TO SAY "I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU, I LOVE YOU" BUT ACT LIKE A JERK, IGNORE HER, LIVE WITH ANOTHER FAMILY, OR ONLY THINK OF MYSELF, I'M NOT REALLY LOVING HER, EVEN IF I SAY OR FEEL LIKE I DO.

THERE ARE SOME RELATIONSHIPS WHICH THE SPOUSES RARELY SAY THE WORD "I LOVE YOU" BUT EXPRESS THIS LOVE CLEARLY AND CONSISTENTLY. IN THIS CONTEXT, NEITHER PARTY WONDERS IF THEIR LOVE IS REAL. THE WORDS MIGHT HELP DEFINE THE FEELINGS OR EXPRESSIONS, BUT LOVE IS BEING LIVED OUT. THE ACTS OF LOVE AREN'T DESIGNED TO PROVE ONE'S LOVE APART FROM THE FEELING OF LOVE, BUT ARE AN EXPRESSION OF THE UNSEEN VIRTUE OF LOVE. IN OTHER WORDS, YOU CAN EVEN DO THE "ACTS OF LOVE" WITHOUT BEING MOTIVATED BY LOVE, AND THE OTHER PARTY WILL LIKELY NOTICE THAT YOUR HEART ISN'T BEHIND IT. THE ACTS OF LOVE, WHEN MOTIVATED BY THE HEART OF LOVE ARE POWERFUL.

SO THE DEEDS OF FAITH, MOTIVATED BY THE HEART OF FAITH ARE POWERFUL TO EXPRESS THE INWARD REALITY OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD. IN ADDITION, THESE ACTIONS ARE EMPOWERED BY THE VERY SPIRIT OF THE GOD IN WHOM WE HAVE FAITH. THEY ARE NOT WORKS OF OUR EFFORTS THEY ARE A RESPONSE IN OUR LIVES TO WHAT GOD HAS DONE. AND SHOULDN'T THE REALITY OF WHAT OUR FAITH IS ROOTED IN (ALMIGHTY GOD & THE RISEN CHRIST) CAUSE US TO BE DIFFERENT THAN WE WERE BEFORE WE HAD FAITH? CAN WE INTERACT WITH SUPERNATURAL POWER AND BELIEVE ETERNAL PROMISES AND REMAIN UNCHANGED?!!!

THE WORLD IS SEARCHING FOR WHAT'S REAL AND GENUINE AND IS TIRED OF TALK. MORE THAN EVER GOD NEEDS HIS PEOPLE TO **ACT LIKE HIS PEOPLE** AND NOT JUST SAY THEY ARE HIS PEOPLE. GOD DOESN'T JUST WANT PEOPLE WHO AGREE TO A STATEMENT OF FAITH, HE WANTS PEOPLE OF FAITH.