



JAMES - Faith in Action

Real Faith Works (5/9)

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CONNECT: Are you ever tempted by showing favouritism? How can Jesus' mercy for you transform how you view people?

Warm-Up

1. Can you share an example of when someone's actions didn't match their words? How did it impact your trust in them?
2. Do good works ever add to our salvation in any way? Why or why not?

Read James 2:14-19

3. What is wrong about claiming to have faith but having no action?
4. Can you think of examples where people have claimed to have faith, but haven't acted on it? Are we ever in danger of this?
5. What sort of actions or deeds does following Jesus require?
6. Is there an area in your life where you aren't submitting to Jesus' lordship? Practically, how could you bring this area into line with Jesus' will and actions?
7. How are deeds and actions a fruit of faith rather than a prerequisite to faith? Why is it so important to get this clear?
8. Is it enough to just mentally assent to a set of doctrines or belief? What does James have to say about this type of faith in 2:19?
9. What's the difference between cultural or nominal Christianity (just claiming the name) and real faith that leads to transformation?
10. How can we ensure that we are submitting to Jesus as living sacrifices rather than just believing that 'God is one'? Is there anyone who you could keep accountable to?

Read James 2:20-26

11. Why was Abraham initially considered to be righteous (cf. Gen 15:6)? How did he demonstrate this faith? Is James arguing for a 'works based righteousness' in these verses? Why/why not?
12. Why is 'faith without deeds' considered to be dead?
13. How are we justified? How should we demonstrate this in our lives today?

APPLY: If real faith always shows itself in action, what's one way you want to live out your faith more clearly this week?

PRAY: *Heavenly Father, thank you that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. Help us to live out a real and active faith, showing Your love through our words and actions. Grow in us fruit that glorifies you and points others to Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*

TITLE: Real Faith - Works

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: We are saved by faith, but this faith always leads to a changed life

STRUCTURE:

- Faith without Action is Dead
- Action is the Fruit of Faith
- Faith and Action Work Together

A Number of years ago I was driving to work on a cool winter's morning when a couple of motorcyclists pulled out behind me.

There was nothing really particularly strange about this but one started to serve, as if to warm up his tyres.

- And he did this for about a kilometre or so until he swerved too far.
- His tyres lost traction and the bike slid out from underneath him and him and the bike went sliding across the road into a ditch at about 70km/h
- I pulled over to make sure he was okay. Luckily he was fine and as we got chatting he told me that ironically he and his mate were headed to a defensive driving course.
- You see it's one thing to say that you're a defensive and cautious driver and even do a course - but it's another thing to actually change how you drive
- It's one thing to say that you're a believer in Jesus and a Christian - it's another thing to actually live a life that has changed and transformed in the light of his grace.
- And this is what James is leading to in these verses here today.
- Claiming that you have faith in Jesus is good! But this faith must always lead to a changed life with good works.
- Good works and action is the fruit of faith. And faith without deeds is dead.
- BUT before we get stuck into this passage, let's keep a few things in mind.
- We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone.
- We aren't saved by what we do, our good works don't attract God to save us, our good works don't play any part in our salvation.
- We see this made abundantly clear in passages like:
 - Rom 5:1 - "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ"
 - Titus 3:4-5 - "But when the kindness and love of God appeared, he saved us not because of righteous things we had done [not because of good works] but because of his mercy"
 - So then, we are saved not because we have somehow earned it by what we do; but simply because of God's unending amazing, phenomenal grace.
 - It's not a case of "I hope I've done enough good stuff!" No. We can be confident in God's free gift to us.

- So if you haven't yet been saved, if you haven't yet turned to Jesus - you can do so freely, not trusting in your own goodness but in God's love and mercy.

o Please do so today!

- However,

- We've just heard from James today that V20 faith without deeds is useless and that V24 a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone and that V26 faith without deeds is dead.

- So is James proclaiming some kind of 'works based righteousness'? OR a salvation by works? OR that our works need to somehow 'top-up' our faith?

- No - not at all.

- James isn't saying that we are saved by our action... but he is saying that our actions are a natural and necessary outworking of our faith in Jesus.

- James is simply saying that if we claim that we are a Christian, then our lives must match up to it.

- So what we'll see today is that:

o Faith Without Action is Dead

o Action is the Fruit of Faith

o Faith and Action Work Together

Faith without Action is Dead

- V14 "What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? "

- And in the original language we expect the answer "no it cannot save them and such faith is not good at all".

- This is really hard to hear isn't it? Maybe a little shocking!

- That a faith without action or without work or without change is useless?

- We can get so comfortable in being saved by grace and that's amazing! We should be able to rest and rejoice in God's grace for us!

- But we can get so comfortable that we forget that we are saved in order to serve and glorify God.

o That we are saved from sin in order to go and sin no more and live for Jesus.

o We are saved by grace alone for God's glory alone. Not for our comfort. Not for our pious ease - but saved, to live for God

- This is the principle that James is teasing out throughout this passage.

- To help us with this, he gives a clear example of a poor brother or sister.

- This person isn't just a little poor or the purse strings are a little tight - but this person doesn't have decent clothing and doesn't have enough money to be able to eat food everyday. Really, he is describing someone living in poverty.

- *Just imagine if someone like this was to walk into this building today and I was to say to them "Go well mate, good luck, sending good vibes - Keep warm and have some food. See ya later"*

- What if I was to even pray with them and ask God for Clothes and for food for this person but still not give them any basic needs. What would you think? What would your gut reaction be?

o His words seem a bit shallow...a bit empty? Is Michael for real here? Does he really practise what

he preaches?

- V15 "If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?"

- Do we see that If these words aren't accompanied by action, then these words are just empty, hollow, disingenuous, unloving, hypocritical, and even dead!?

- What good are these words if we don't do anything!? No good! Useless!

o Like having an battery drill without a Battery; a BBQ without gas; a coffee machine with no water. Useless. Dead.

- And in the same way James says V17 "In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

- If our lips proclaim that Jesus is our Lord and Saviour but this doesn't produce the fruit of repentance and action, then our faith is like this.

- If we claim to be followers of Jesus and yet we still live exactly as the world does, then our faith is like this.

- If we claim with our lips that we are a Christian but our way of life hasn't been changed by Jesus, then our faith is like this. Dead.

o Please hear this: This isn't saying that we have to be perfect! This isn't saying That our good works can save us or add to our salvation in any any any way! BUT that our faith in Jesus must naturally lead us into living a life for Jesus.

o If it doesn't, then our faith is like empty, hollow, hypocritical words.

- Because Action is always the fruit of faith.

Action is the Fruit of Faith

- Now some people may say that Action and Faith are two separate things.

- That there is no connection. Maybe even two different gifts

o You know, "you have the gift of faith, I have the gift of action. I can take one and leave the other."

- BUT James says that this isn't the case. He brings in an imaginary person to argue with him to make his case that actions are a natural outflowing of faith.

- 2:18 "But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works."

- James is kind of mocking his friend here..he is saying 'make visible your faith without deeds...go for it...show it off!!' but actually we can't.

- We can't make visible what is hidden. We can't show off faith without deeds because faith without deeds is useless.

- However, a faith that results in a changed life, a changed allegiance, a new way of living, that results in good works is an active and alive and a **VISIBLE** faith.

- And so that is how faith can be seen. That is how real faith works....it produces the fruit of good works!

- *Just imagine that you wanted to start a garden [now these aren't gardening tips from Michael but just my observations here...]*

- *And you set up a little nursery, put seeds in a little planter box, make sure the climate is right, that there's enough water.*

- *Those seeds aren't in there to just be there looking invisible...they are there to produce a plant; produce fruit! If there is no fruit...then the seeds are useless.*

- Similarly our faith isn't just something that we mentally assent to. Or hat tip to - and it produces no change...or is just invisible...no our faith is there to be shown off, to be made visible, in every area of our lives.

o It's to change the way we think, the way we act, the way we behave, the way we speak, the way to treat other people, the way we use our time, the way we use our financial resources,

o Our faith is to produce the fruit of good works and actions in every area!

o Note: This shouldn't leave us thinking "Gosh have a got enough fruit?" No. Remember it's not the fruit that saves us but the faith that is rooted in Jesus saves.

o But the faith should produce the fruit of repentance.

- Because if we don't...if we say that we believe that Jesus is Lord but it doesn't change our life...then James says that we are no better off than the demons.

- V19 "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! "

- We should remember here that James is probably writing to a Jewish-Christian audience. And in this verse, he quotes the 'Shema' which is a Jewish confession of faith.

- And he's saying that if they believe this but don't act on it, then they are just as in trouble as the agents of the evil one. A big warning.

- And this is a warning to us. This is a warning against nominal or cultural Christianity. A version of Christianity which says "yeah you're a Christian but only by title. Or only by the box we ticked on the census."

- Or a version of Christianity that says "we've been going to church all our lives. That's just what we do. Of course we are Christian" but has no impact on our lives.

o [or a version of Christianity that says "We should get our kids baptised so that they can get into a good school...of course we're christian"]

- This isn't real faith and this sort of faith is dead.

- We could have the most perfect doctrine in our heads, we could have the Apostles and Nicene Creeds memorised, the confessions memorised, and we could say that Jesus is God!

- But as Jesus says in Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."...//

- Jesus has saved us not for us to only acknowledge him with our lips, but to follow him with our lives.

- For me personally this is a warning against professional Christianity. Of thinking that I'm a minister so of course I'm a Christian! I even went to bible college and learned greek!
- But is my life really reflecting the faith that I preach? In someways yes. But in a lot of ways, no sadly.
- Not that I have to earn my faith but that my actions ought to be the fruit of faith
 - Our actions ought to be the fruit of faith.
- *Let's say that you claim to be a michelin star chef. You have all the cooking books, all the pots and pans, the sharpest knives, and the most premium ingredients. Maybe you've even watched every episode of masterchef and have taken notes.*
- *But if you've done all of these things but have never cooked a single thing in your life...can you claim to be a chef?*
- *Your claims are empty because there is no evidence. No fruit.*
 - Likewise, our claim to faith should be matched by the fruit of our faith. Good works. Good deeds.

Action.

- And these aren't two separate things...no...rather faith and action work together.

Faith and Action Work Together

- James uses two examples from Israel's history to point out that faith results in deeds or actions.
- Firstly he mentions the great Jewish patriarch Abraham and then secondly the gentile prostitute Rahab.
- Both believed in God.
- Both had faith in God; But also,
- Both worked for God.
- V20 "Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God"
- Now let's get this order correct. In Gen 15, God promised Abraham that he and he wife would have a son and that from this son, a great nation was to be born.
- Then Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. - Gen 15:6
- Then Isaac was born by chapter 21 and then the testing that James mentions happened in Gen 22.
- His faith was there before the works. His righteousness was declared before this work in obedience to God.
- He went to offer his son to God, trusting in God, believing in God, working for God and God recognised his obedience as the evidence of faith.

- His faith led him to obey God. Amazing obedience. His righteousness or 'rightness with God' was made visible by what he did; was validated by what he did. His faith reached its full potential and purpose when he was living for God.

- And so does ours. Our faith and action ought to work together to lead us to obedience to the will of God and to live for his glory! **Then** our faith is living out its purpose and proved to be alive.

o Our faith isn't for our comfort; or for a life of ease; or for our health and wealth; BUT RATHER it's for us to be in relationship with God and to serve and obey him.

- As Martin Luther wrote, "We are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone"

- Rahab also grasped this. Before the spies came into Jericho to spy out the Promised Land while the Israelites were still in the wilderness, she had heard about the Lord and believed in him.

- Then she demonstrated her faith in her actions by saving the spies' lives and sending them off away from trouble.

- Her faith and actions worked together for God's purposes

- And so James concludes: V26 "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."

CONC

- Faith without deeds is no faith at all. But it's shallow, empty, and it doesn't reach its full purpose or potential.

- One of the biggest belief blockers in Australia is the hypocrisy of Christians. That is Christians who claim to have faith but their lives don't match up to their confession.

- But James here says that there ought to be none of that because real faith works.

- And this work will look different for everyone.

o It could mean serving in a soup kitchen and giving to the poor. Given what we've been seeing in James, that would be quite appropriate!

o It could mean serving God faithfully and generously on your frontlines. Simply Living faithfully in a world that is so unfaithful.

o It could mean prioritising God in family life and in your diary.

o It could mean remaining diligent and faithful in prayer for the world and the church.

- It could mean all of these things and more!

- Not that we want to tick off a list; or rock up to heaven with our badges of achievements

- No, but we ought to bring every area of our lives to obedience to Christ.

- Now there could be some people now who may consider themselves a follower of Jesus because they are simply here, or agree with the creeds, or are fans of Jesus, or have just come to church all their lives.

o If this is you - is your life matching up to the faith you claim? Have you repented and turned all of your life under the Lordship of Jesus?

- Because if you profess faith but don't live into it - then be warned. Faith without action is dead.
 - On the flipside, there may be some of us who find this passage really quite confronting.
 - Our love seems often cold; our service half-hearted; and our actions weak. Passages like this can cause us to really question if we truly follow Christ.
 - If this is you today - remember, that we aren't saved by what we do but by what Jesus has done for us on the cross and in his resurrection.
 - Take heart, turn your eyes upon Jesus, and continue to live for him. You are saved. You are loved. And so go and continue to live out your faith trusting not in your goodness, but in God's love and mercy for you.
-
- "O it is a living, busy active mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good things incessantly. It does not ask whether good works are to be done, but before the question is asked, it has already done this, and is constantly doing them. Whoever does not do such works, however, is an unbeliever. He gropes and looks around for faith and good works, but knows neither what faith is nor what good works are. Yet he talks and talks, with many words, about faith and good works." Luther, Preface to Romans.