



MAKING IT REAL 4 - Save me from dead words James 2 v 14 to 26

There is no let up here as James continues on his theme of faith, words and deeds. The passage opens with two rhetorical questions. You might like to start your group time by suggesting what answers you might have given James.

What good is faith without deeds?

Can such faith save him?

The issue is not new to James – he has introduced it in chapter 1. He is trying to establish what authentic faith should really look like. He insists it is not just understanding a series of doctrines. It is about biblical truth lived out in day-to-day life.

He makes his point with an illustration from the life of the church community. The link with the earlier part of the chapter would suggest that James knew that wealth was an issue in the 1st century church. The ‘suppose a brother’ phrase (v15) is most unlikely to be hypothetical. It is something James has heard and is concerned about. There are numerous OT parallels (e.g. Job 24:7, Isaiah 58:7) where the writers express the plight of the ‘ill-clothed and hungry’. You may like to consider the more general question

Should the ‘ill-clothed and hungry’ be on our church agenda?

How do we address it nationally?

How do we address it internationally?

Is there anything we can do to deal with such a huge issue?

FROM THE PASSAGE

Verses 14 to 17

The specific example James uses is of a ‘brother or sister’ without basic human resources. So, this is someone in the church community who is suffering a hard time. James gives two responses. Some people ‘wish him well’ but do nothing about it, which James roundly condemns. It’s a bit like us saying ‘bless you my friend’ when it is blatantly obvious that the person is in real need

- 1. Are we too distant in our dealings with our brothers and sisters?**

Do we choose to keep people at arms’ length so we don’t have to engage with their real situation?

Is it possible that we think our only responsibility towards our fellow Christians is to check that their discipleship is still on track?

Is engaging with real needs the job of our welfare state and therefore not part of the church’s responsibility?

Talk about some practical ways you have met the needs of other believers.

Talk about ways we could be more involved.

Verses 18 to 20

To emphasise his practical example in the previous verses, James now argues that a faith without action is a dead faith. True faith, he insists, always changes the heart and therefore results in acts of mercy and compassion. This may threaten some of us who have seen ourselves as evangelical ‘bastions of the truth’. James is not saying that holding fast to biblical faith isn’t needed. But he is saying that if you believe it you have to live it out otherwise it’s ‘dead’.

- 2. James introduces a ‘someone’ in verse 18 – again highly likely to be a real person that James has heard about. What is the problem with this person’s argument that some of us have ‘faith’ and some of us have ‘deeds? That is, we have one or the other but not both**

He follows up his argument by saying even the demons believe there is a God. Again, he is emphasising that just saying you believe in God is insufficient.

3. How do we make sure that our faith is what drives our actions?
When does that fail?

Verses 21 to 24

James takes his readers back to the story of Abraham and Isaac. This has always been a startling story to the Israelite nation. Abraham was known as the father of the nation and often commended for his faith (Hebrews 11:8). From that it might be possible to say all you need is faith just like our father Abraham. So, James relates one of the most trusting ACTIONS ever done by a human being – prepared to slaughter his son if that was God’s way.

4. Abraham was credited as righteous because of his actions. He was ‘called God’s friend’ and ‘justified by what he did’.
Does this rule out a Christian life without action?
What does this mean for the believer who finds activity difficult?

Verses 25 to 27

James moves from a man regarded as a major Israelite leader to a woman of dubious reputation. In Jewish tradition Rahab the deliverer of Jericho married Joshua (no biblical record). She is also included in the ancestors of Jesus (Matt 1:5). But biblically she is noted for giving hospitality to the spies who were sussing out Jericho. James is saying EVEN RAHAB showed hospitality and therefore what she DID was seen by God as a sign of her faith.

5. Is it just possible we can doubt the true faith of another Christian even though they are doing good works but they have a chequered past?
Are we too selective in what we value in other people?

The example of Rahab clinches James’s point. This woman was no saint but contributed to God’s purposes in conquering the land. Her actions were crucial and Israel had the land God has promised to ABRAHAM (Genesis 15). It’s interesting that James’ two examples are inter-connected through GOD’s ACTIONS in saving his people.

THINGS TO DO

Again, James’s writing is challenging and encourages us to evaluate what we do.

Why not take time to

1. Thank God that you have been given the gift of faith to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Ask God to shape all the actions you undertake in all aspects of your life – your family, your work, your recreation etc.
3. Is there some new activity you should be involved in?
4. Are there some actions in your life that do NOT reflect that you are a follower of Jesus?

SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Ask yourself if your actions are an outworking of your faith.