

Faith Acts

Lesson for Sunday, October 29, 2023

TEXT: James 2:14-19

Introduction:

- ⇒ What is a passage or doctrine of the Bible that you would consider controversial? *Allow for some discussion...*
- ⇒ Today's passage in James is one of those controversial passages.
 - Martin Luther once called James an "epistle of straw" and that he almost felt like "throwing Jimmy in the stove!" Luther's feelings about James mainly stemmed from today's passage.
- ⇒ James is having a conversation with an imaginary person who claims that they have faith but their faith has no deeds. They are arguing that you can separate faith from works.
- ⇒ James tackles this idea directly. Our goal is to move through this passage carefully so there are no misunderstandings as to what the Bible is teaching.

Bible Study:

1. Three Key **Truths** (vs. 14-18)
 - a. The key **word** in this passage is "faith." It is mentioned 11 times in these verses.
 - b. The key **observation** is that James is not talking about someone with an immature faith, or backslidden. He is saying that you either have faith that saves or you don't.
 - c. The key **warning** is stated in verse 14: A dead faith cannot save.
 - d. In making his case, James presents three main truths we must recognize.
 - e. Truth #1: Faith in our hearts is evident in the fruit of our **lives** (vs. 14).
 - i. James clearly states that it is possible to claim faith and not actually have it.
 - ii. The key to knowing if you have genuine faith is to look for the fruit.
 - iii. "Works" are the fruit of faith. "Works" are the end result, or the product that is produced.
 - iv. Illustration: When you pass an apple tree, how do you know it is an apple tree? By the fruit! When you pass a Christian, how do you know they are a Christian? By their fruit!
 - v. If you have time, refer to Matthew 7:16-20 where Jesus makes this exact point.
 - f. Truth #2: Faith in our hearts is evident in our **concern** and **care** for believers in need (vs. 15-17).
 - i. James is restating his key warning for a second time. He says that a faith that doesn't have compassion on those within the body of Christ who have genuine need is worthless!
 - ii. That is a "faith" that cannot save. See 1 John 3:17.
 - iii. It is important to remember that acts of mercy are not a means to salvation, but are evidence of genuine salvation.
 - iv. If you have time, reference Jesus's words in Matthew 25:31-40. When minister to others we are ministering to Christ!
 - v. James point is that the overflow of the Christian's heart is to serve. God's mercy to us compels our mercy to others.
 - g. Truth #3: Faith without works is a **worthless** faith (vs. 18).
 - i. For a third time, James is driving home his point.

- ii. Works, deeds, and actions are not optional for those who have genuine faith – they are inevitable.
- 2. Three Key **Conclusions** (vs. 19)
 - a. In this passage James makes three points abundantly clear.
 - b. Conclusion #1: Faith is not mere **intellectual** assent.
 - i. What a thought! Even the demons believe!
 - ii. Every Jew would quote the Shema (Deut. 6:4). The demons believe the Shema.
 - iii. We saw in our study of Mark that every time the demons encountered Jesus they were very clear in their doctrine! They understood Who Jesus was and what He was capable of.
 - iv. We wouldn't say the demons are saved. Intellectual assent is not enough to save a soul. Read Titus 1:15-16.
 - c. Conclusion #2: Faith is not simply an **emotional** response.
 - i. Notice that the demons have an emotional response to Jesus – they shudder!
 - ii. The demons are affected by the truth of God.
 - iii. Too many people define their faith today merely by the emotions they feel at a given time.
 - iv. We can't judge our faith by our emotions.
 - d. Conclusion #3: Faith results in willful **obedience**.
 - i. The point James has stated over and over – you show your faith not just by what you think or by what you feel, but by what you do.
 - ii. Faith acts. Faith acts on the Word. Faith in our hearts is evident by the fruit of our lives.

DISCUSSION/APPLICATION:

- ⇒ Remind them to be working on memorizing James 2:17 – the keystone verse of chapter 2.
- ⇒ Do you think you could explain what James is teaching in this passage to someone who has questions? Are there questions you still have about this passage that we did not cover?
- ⇒ Personal Application: What fruit is your faith producing? Make sure your class knows they can come to you with questions privately.