

Preaching Christ....
...by the power of the Holy Spirit
...and the authority of the Word of God

Sermon

The Epistle of James

5 November 2023

James 2:14-26

4 Is your faith dead?

1. **Dead faith illustrated** vv14-16
2. **True trust explained** vv17-19
3. **True trust illustrated** vv20-16

- Last week my opening line was: “If your relationship with Jesus is **genuine**, it cannot **help** but make a difference in your life.”
- Let me go one step further... if there is no **outward evidence** of a **real** relationship with God in your life... then its highly likely there **isn't** a real relationship with God. //
- Or as James says a little more bluntly – ***faith without works // is dead.***
- James started on this theme back in chapter 1 do you recall?
- *Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after the orphans and widows in their distress and, to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.*
- Religion – true relationship with God – WILL show itself by **mirroring** God's **care** and **action** for the **poor**. AND taking a

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stand against all the rubbish on our media that pollutes our minds!

- Then in last week's passage, James says – have a good look at yourselves – what you're actually doing is paying more attention to the **rich** and ignoring the **poor**.
- Even in your assemblies – you show the **rich** the **best seats** and have the **poor** stand at the **back**!
- **God** has demonstrated his love and action for the **poor**
- **You** have demonstrated **your** love and action for the **rich**!
- So what good is your **claim** to **faith**?
- It's just a **claim**. It has no **reality**.
- And a **claim** to have faith which has no reality, **cannot, will not, save** you.
- It has to be a question worth asking this morning doesn't it?
- Is it possible that my **claim** to have **faith** is just **that**?
- A **claim** not based in **reality**?
- A **claim**, without any **evidence**?
- That would be a **terrible thought**...
- So let's see what James says and see if we can work out where we stand...
- Let's look firstly at:

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1. Dead faith illustrated (vv 14-16)

- Have you seen that show ‘hypothetical’ with Geoffrey Robinson?
- Where different hypothetical situations are put before a panel of experts of various kinds to see what they would do in the situation?
- James has a hypothetical for us.
- v15 - **Suppose** *a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?*
- A man rang the church phone in Noosa a few years back.
- He had moved in to the area, was staying in the caravan park waiting for a rental house he had lined up to become available. He had a couple of teenagers and because he’d had to pay a bond on the house and then a lot of money for the caravan park, they had no food until centre link payment in a couple of days.
- Can you imagine if I’d said to him ‘well, sorry to hear about your situation; I hope everything works out OK for you and your family – good luck’? and then hung up the **phone**.
- **Sad!!** - and **useless**.
- But you know what? – it’s not far from the reality of what I had done on some **previous** occasions...

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- At Roseville we were on the train line... and up and down the North Shore of Sydney there are a quite a few churches close to the railway line.
- So homeless people used to ride the train lines and stop off at the Rectories (ministers' residences) along the way.
- How do you help some of those people?
- Some of them pushed my patience when they came to the door with a lighted cigarette in hand, smelling of alcohol.
- Some of them – I dismissed pretty smartly – out of a mixed sense of **despair** – not knowing what to do – **annoyance** – they always called at the worst of times – and **helplessness** – what I do to really help anyway?
- I am certain in some cases I could have done **more** than what I **did!**
- So what **good** is it, if I simply say 'peace be with you' but do **nothing** to ensure that person has any **physical comfort?** //
- If that's the best my faith can lead me to do, says James, it is **dead**. It is not **faith**. It is not **real**.

2. True trust explained (vv 17-19)

- James' point is simple – let's have a look: - v17 *In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*

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- Faith by itself – that does **nothing** for the **needy** and **poor** and **homeless** and **addicted** other than wish them well as they go on their way – is **dead**.
- **Dead.**
- Not **sick**
- Not **struggling**.
- But **dead**. //
- Are you **sure** James? //
- We have to be clear about how he's using the word 'faith' here.
- It's a **claim** to faith he says.
- It's a **claim** to believe something is **true**... but doesn't **act** on the truth at **all**.
- It's not **true faith**. ///
- You see, you actually can't separate **faith** and **deeds**; or **faith** and the outward **expression** of faith.
- So in this hypothetical panel James is running – someone says (v18) – *'you have faith, I have deeds'*...
- You know – as if the church needs all types – some people have faith – and some people who those who just get on and do stuff.
- But James is saying – **no!** – you can't **separate** them.

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- They belong **together**. Faith and deeds – are **inseparable**.
- So he challenges – ‘**show** me your faith without deeds’...
- And of course – how **can** you?
- The only way you can **demonstrate** true **faith** – real **trust** - is as that trust is being **expressed**.
- Famous tightrope walker – Blondin. Niagara falls. “We believe in you Blondin.” “OK – so who will jump in the wheel barrow!?” //
- “You believe there is one God...” says James – picking up on the foundation of Jewish faith...
- Good... but so **what**...?
- Even the **demons** believe there is one **God** – at least they **shudder** at the **thought**!
- **Real relationship** you see – **true trust** – will make a **difference**...
- So he gives us finally, two illustrations of what true trust looks like:

3. True trust illustrated (vv20-26)

- The first one comes right out of Genesis 22 and would have been a story his first readers knew backwards.
- It’s the story of the radical demand for Abraham to sacrifice his only son.

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- A son much **promised** and long **waited**.
- But implicit trust in both the **character** and **purposes** of the God he knew and loved, meant that Abraham's **trust** resulted in **obedience**.
- His faith was 'made **complete**' – that is revealed to be a **true faith** – a **real trust** – by this **amazing** act of **devotion**.
- (if you're not familiar with the story – let me assure you that Abraham was not required to go through with such a shocking thing – but God stopped him and provided a lamb for sacrifice in the boy's place – an early sign way back in Genesis of God providing the lamb of God – his Son – to take away the sins of the world!)
- But as a result of Abraham's **obedience** which sprang from his **trust**, the saying in Genesis 15 – 'Abraham believed God' – trusted God 'and it was credited to him as righteousness' was fulfilled – demonstrated as being true.
- That is, his faith had brought him into a right relationship with God.
- So to believe God, is a commitment to action.
- If it's **real**, - a real trust, a real belief, a real faith - you'll **see** it.
- So James gives us a summary statement in v24: *You see that a person is justified by what he **does** and not by faith **alone**...*
- What James means is that **true** faith – **real** trust – can never exist by **itself**.

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- He's not saying anything in contrast to the Apostle Paul when he says that it is only by grace we can be saved.
- He's saying – yes – it is of course, grace that saves us – but the faith which comes by grace – THEN works its way out – finds its expression – in our lives!
- It will **always** be seen in **changed lives**.
- Always expressed by **love**, by **obedience**... in terms of what James has already said so far in this letter – by **caring** for the **marginalised**, keeping a **rein** on your **tongue** (more of that next week); by treating **all** people the **same**... by keeping ourselves from being polluted by the world!
- **True** faith is **never alone**. //
- One more illustration.
- **Rahab**. You can read her story in Joshua 2. Rahab was a **pagan prostitute**. So she's **not a Jew** and her lifestyle is **unacceptable**.
- Yet – she is credited with having a **true faith** – a **real trust**... because when the spies who came to check out the promised land before God's people crossed over and went in... she helped them out by giving **hospitality** and helping them escape **Jericho**. She gave **lodging** to those in **need**.
- Whatever she **knew** of the one true God was **enough** for her to **endanger** her own life for the **sake** of God's **people**.

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- Her **faith** moved from **knowing** there is **one** God... to **trusting** him for her **life**... and she was considered **right** with God on the basis of it.
- So James ends the section with **another** pithy summary in v26 – *as the **body** without the **spirit** is **dead**, so **faith** without **deeds** is **dead**.*
- As life consists of **body** + **spirit**, so true **spiritual** life consists of **faith** + **deeds**. ///
- **Is your faith dead?**
- I can't answer that for you.
- And it's not for me to **judge**.
- But Jesus said – by their **fruit** you will know them. (Matthew 7:15-20). That is, whatever is in people's **hearts** will eventually be seen in their **lives**. **Good** tree, **good** fruit. **Bad** tree, **bad** fruit!
- If your **claim to have faith** never moves you from **good intentions** to **loving actions**... it could be **dead**.
- If your **claimed faith** is never seen outside the four **walls of your church (or home)**, it could be **dead**
- If your **claim to have faith** doesn't move you to give to the **poor**, it could be **dead**

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- If your **claim to have faith** doesn't move you to put your **life**, your **reputation**, your **popularity** on the **line** for **Jesus' sake**, it could just be **dead**.
- If your **claim to have faith** doesn't express itself in **dependent prayer** and heart-felt **thanks** – it could be **dead**
- If you keep **no rein** on your **tongue**, if you show **favouritism** to the those from whom you hope to **gain something...** your faith could be **dead**
- If you are not **loving** your neighbour as **yourself**, your faith could be **dead**. ///
- You might say – **hang** on a **minute...** I wouldn't **be here** in church would I, if my **faith** were **dead**?
- Mmm – **maybe**.
- What if coming to church made you **feel** like your faith was real... but once you head **home...** it's **never** on your heart or mind until church next **week...**
- ... what would you say about 'faith' like **that**?
- What if you thought that just going to church, kind of kept God **happy** for the week... and **that's** all there was **to** it?
- What if you just thought going to church, made you appear – **respectable...**?
- Yes – I do think it is possible to be **in church** but have a faith which is just a '**claimed**' faith. **Not real**. Not a real **trust**.

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- **But that's not my call.**
- That's **YOUR** call.
- **IS** your faith dead?
- Or is it a **real, lively, personal everyday trust** in our **great God** and **Father...** and his **Son the Lord Jesus Christ?**
- Does that trust in him mean you live **his** way trusting his **purposes?**
- Does it mean you have **joy** and contentment in him – even in the **hard** times?
- Does it mean you long for a **transformed life** which grows more like Jesus?
- Does it mean you **hate sin** and **love godliness?**
- Does it mean you increasingly want to **serve** God...?
- Serve his **people**.
- Help people **everywhere** in need.
- Does it mean you shun **materialism** and **greed?**
- Do battle with **language** and **lust?**
- Are you seeking to be a **peacemaker?**
- Longing for others to **know** Jesus as you know him?
- Seeking to **wrestle** with his **word** and **kneel** before him in **prayer...**

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- Is your life more about **JESUS** than **anyONE** else – more about Jesus than **YOU** – or any**THING** else...?
- Is Jesus not just **PART** of your life... but **IS** your life..? //
- Then – friends – if those things are true - your trust is **real**... your **relationship** is real... your **claim** to **faith** is more than just a **CLAIM**...!
- For a faith that is **real** – a faith that **saves** – a faith which puts you right with God; is **NEVER alone** – it **always** means a **transformed life**... it is **always** written in a person's face and seen **clearly** in their **lives**...
- And I pray that **more** and **more**, our churches will be filled with people who have a **faith** – a **trust** - which is **real** and **deep** and **personal** // and is **changing** our **lives week by week** – **month by month** – so that we are the people God **wants** us to **be**...
- What good is it my brothers and sisters if a person **CLAIMS** to have faith, but has no **deeds**? – no **outward expression** – shows no **evidence** in their **lives**?
- Can such faith **save** them?
- **NO!**
- But If your relationship with Jesus is **genuine**, it cannot **help** but make a **difference** in your **life**.
- **Today**. And **every** day!