

DAY 1 - (week beginning Mon 27 Aug 2018)**Read - James 1: 22-25; 2:14-26**

It is important to listen to what God's word says, but it is more important to *do* what it says. We can measure the effectiveness of our bible study time by the effect it has on our behaviour and attitudes. Do we put into action what we have studied? It seems paradoxical that a law could give us freedom, but God's law offers us a true reflection of our sinful condition and gives us the opportunity to ask for God's forgiveness.(see Romans 7:7,8)

As Christians we are saved by God's grace, and salvation frees us from sin's control. As believers, we are free to live as God created us to live. Of course, this does not mean that we are free to do as we please. We are now free to obey God.

When we claim to have faith, what we may have is intellectual assent – agreement with a set of Christian teachings – and as such is incomplete faith. True faith transforms our conduct and behaviour as well as our thoughts. If our lives remain unchanged we don't truly believe the truths we claim to believe. We cannot earn our salvation by serving and obeying God, but our actions will show that our commitment to God is real. Deeds and loving service are not a substitute for, but rather a verification of, our faith in Christ.

Now look at James 2:18 – While it is true our deeds can never earn salvation, true faith always results in a changed life and good deeds. James speaks against those who confuse intellectual assent with true faith. After all, true faith is a commitment of our whole self to God – body, mind and spirit!

Prayer: Father, take my life – my body, mind and spirit - and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee. Amen.

DAY 2**Read - Ephesians 2:8,9; James 2:14-17**

Have you ever heard the phrase “re-arranging the deckchairs on the Titanic”? It means that it's pretty useless paying attention to deckchairs until you've dealt with the iceberg ahead. The iceberg in life is death! I know this sounds morbid, but we need to pay attention to what Scripture says about life and death.

We have the good fortune of knowing what God promises after death, but we also need to know that certain things are expected of us. So let us put some substance to this, or put it in perspective if you like.

Before you continue, please read again the two apparently contradictory passages of scripture for today.

Ephesians 2: 8-9. Many people will respond to this by saying “You see, God has it covered, I believe in Jesus ... that is enough!”

Well, yes, but what about James 2: 14-17 and 24? which verse will you go for? Let me say that when you encounter contradictions like this you have four choices

- First – You can say “See, I told you that the Scriptures contradict each other, and I'm therefore going to abandon them”
- Second - You can get to work! And see how much you can do before you hit the Iceberg!
- Third - You can rest on your “faith laurels” ... and hope that James was wrong!!
- Fourth - You can dig a little deeper to try and understand what James is really saying. I'm obviously going for number four!

Prayer: Father Take my hands, and let them move at the impulse of your love. Take my feet and let them be swift and beautiful for thee. Amen.

DAY 3**Read - Ephesians 2:8,9; James 2:1-17,**

Firstly ... Look at James 2:14 again ... *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such faith save them?* The key word is “claim”, basically saying that we claim we believe in God and in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit, but our deeds, or our lack of deeds, do not confirm this! And James asks - “can this faith save us?” In a sense this is bogus faith, saying one thing and doing something else. Or not doing anything at all!

The world is full of people saying “Lord, Lord”. But Jesus in Matthew 7:21 says “Not everyone who says Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven” I think we run into people every day who say they believe in Jesus, that He died for their sins, but we never see any evidence of this in their daily lives.

Paul says this very well in Titus 1:16, “They claim” (this is the same word that James is using) “to know God, but by their actions they deny him”

Secondly Do you know what percentage of people believe in God? The answer is a pretty amazing, 93 percent.

What percentage of people believe Jesus is the Son of God? - 86 percent.

Now, do you know what percentage of *demons* believe there is a God? Here it is - 100 percent, and they shudder! - James says that they shudder because they know that God is real, and that God is true, and they shudder because intellectual knowledge about the reality of God isn't enough to bring about their conversion.

And now James gives us the real answers – James 2: 20-24

Dear Father God, please forgive my unbelief! Amen

DAY 4

Read - James 2: 20-24; Ephesians 2:8,9

You know the story of Abraham and Sarah, childless until very old, they have a son, Isaac. God asks Abraham to sacrifice Isaac and the angel stops him just before he brings the knife down. This was faith and actions working together. Abraham's faith was made complete by what he did. James points us to two things ... Abraham's faith and Abraham's works. And now in verse 23 "*And the scripture was fulfilled that says, Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,*" What a moment, when faith and works come together, and we are told we are righteous. Perhaps this is the pinnacle of life? When faith and works come together, work together and are seen to be together!

This outward act, this work of obedience, demonstrated that the faith that Abraham had on the inside was genuine. So it is for us, our conversion takes place by faith alone. That's the way it worked with Abraham, and that's the way it always works with us today.

Our relationship with God is made right by grace through faith and good works! However strong and good our faith is, it will always be revealed in our actions. You cannot have one without the other. And this is the challenge. Do our actions reflect our faith or not?

Faith saves, works confirm. Look at Ephesians 2 again. "*For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith ...*"

Prayer: Dear Lord, My faith looks up to thee, thou lamb of Calvary, Saviour divine. Now hear me while I pray; take all my guilt away; O let me from this day be wholly thine. Amen.

DAY 5

Read - James 2: 20-24; Ephesians 2:8,9

Paul is saying in verse 10 that God's design is that faith alone saves us, but it is also in God's grand design that he has things he wants us to do for Him. The challenge for today is, what are we doing? - Three things.

First, for us to test our faith. Ask yourself "what am I doing with this?" - It's easy to come and worship and sing and pray and listen, but is this just intellectual? ... *What am I doing?*

Second. Let's celebrate our faith. There's no-one in the world more able to celebrate than Christians. Because we've dealt with the iceberg! This is why we worship, because we're *doing* something.

Third. Let's authenticate our faith, and I don't think I have to tell you to authenticate your faith. I think you're doing it already. There is so much going on in our churches that tells me we are authentic.

Look at your church bulletin and notice how many activities happen in our churches. Everything we do is about reaching out to our communities, and bringing something of what we've learned and heard on Sunday into someone else's life from Monday to Saturday.

In a nutshell – faith and works go together. **Where do you fit in?**

Now go into the world in peace. Have courage. Hold on to what is good. Honour all men. Strengthen the fainthearted. Support the weak. Help the suffering. And share the gospel. Love and serve the Lord in the power of the Holy Spirit. And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

DAY 6

Read - James 1: 2-4

Is there anyone who has not had moments of depression and burnout and a sense of futility in life? We all have to deal with this in an on-going way, and how we deal with all this, in God's mysterious ways, somehow translates into action or works.

Faith and works and perseverance go hand in hand. You cannot have faith without it being followed by works. And the more we persevere in our faith the more we reach a point in our spiritual journey when we can honestly say, "there is nothing life can throw at me that will cause me to turn my back on God. God has proved himself to me over and over again, too many times for me to question Him".

When we can say this, good things begin to happen. Many people who have been through this kind of fire have an enormous capacity for empathy. You see it in their eyes, hear it in their voices, and feel it in their touch, because they've been battle-tested. They've been there!

And so a final question for the week. Having heard all this. Is it possible that our faith journey will produce an outreach, or "works" which show the story of our lives, without us having to preach it? That we feed the hungry / visit the sick / bake cookies / pray for our homeless ones / pray with the dying / rejoice with those who celebrate etc etc, simply because our faith, and the practice of our faith, brings us to a place where we instinctively reach out to our broken world **because** we have been blessed to be a blessing?

In my mind THIS is "Faith and Works"