

Home group questions on James 2:14-26

By Phil Bailey

Theme: *Faith without deeds is dead and useless; true, saving faith always shows itself in love and sacrifice.*

Aims: *Recognise that professed belief is empty and powerless to save if it doesn't bear fruit in deeds*

Reflect on our own lives and whether there is evidence of saving faith.

It is important to understand how James's teaching sits alongside Paul's famous passages on justification by faith alone in Romans 3-5 and Galatians 2-3. James is not undermining Paul, as I tried to explain in the sermon! However, we must not use those wonderful assurances of acquittal and acceptance by God to deflect the serious questions raised by James's letter. Although we are saved by faith alone, true faith never remains alone. It always shows itself in good works. In fact, it is impossible for this not to happen, because no one can have true faith unless they've been born again by the Holy Spirit and the Word (see James 1:18). And no one who has been born again is left unchanged in their sin! So Jesus will look for good deeds in our lives as evidence of new birth and saving faith at the final judgment (hence Paul's words in Romans 2:5-11).

Therefore, if we want to have assurance of salvation in this life, we should be careful to believe the right things by submitting our minds to God's Word. But we should also be careful to examine ourselves and see if we are *obeying* that Word in our deeds. That is a vital way to tell if we have really believed and accepted what the Word says. We don't need to fulfil a certain quota of change in order to have assurance. The Bible never says it's like an exam where at least 50% of our deeds must be good, in order for our faith to be proved genuine! However, there must be some evidence of change in our lives. Particularly if you've been a Christian for many years, you should be able to look back and see you're not quite the same person you were 5, 10 or 20 years ago. You probably still struggle with many of the same sins, but there will have been some progress in a true believer, because they have the Spirit and the Word in their hearts! If there is such evidence, however small, we can rejoice and be confident. But even then, we mustn't become complacent. Like the parable of the talents (Matt 25:15-30), Jesus does not want us to be idle with what he's given us!

- 1) Recap: why does James say faith by itself, if not accompanied by action, is dead (v.17)?
- 2) How does Jesus' teaching in Luke 6:43-49 and 13:1-8 help us understand what James is talking about?
You may want to split into two groups, one group looking at each passage, then feeding back to each other afterwards.
- 3) James's words (like Jesus's) call for examination of our own lives. Where do you see good fruit that evidences true faith? *It's probably more helpful to discuss this in pairs/threes, rather than as a group.*
Spend a little time in prayer, giving thanks to God for his work in you.
- 4) Where do you see a lack of fruit? Is it in any of the areas James focuses on – care for the poor and vulnerable (1.27), favouritism (2.1-13), use of words (1.26, 3.1-12), pride, selfishness and boasting (4), greed (5.1-6), grumbling (5.7-9), patience and perseverance in the face of suffering (1.1-12, 5.10-11)?
Again, this is probably best done in 2-3s.

A lack of fruit shows a lack of faith. In those areas of our lives, the implanted word (1.21) has not yet had much effect.

- Is it possible you've grown complacent in this area? If so, why?
- What is it that you trust in more than God's word, which calls you to change?
- What would it look like to do 1.21 in this area of your life? 'Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent, and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.'

Spend time praying for each other about these areas where you want to see change.