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What does real faith look like? James 2:1-17: September 9

Introduction:

Soon after Donald Trump was elected as the President of the United States, he quined the expression *fake news*.

If the Apostle James was writing his letter in 2018 he may well have used this expression to describe Christian faith which appears in some situations to be a mere confession of the lips.

Faith and deeds is the big picture in James Chapter 2. James poses the question: *What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?* These are great questions! They are important questions!

Setting the scene:

James was writing to scattered Christians about their life of faith as Christian communities. While The Apostles Paul and John wrote to specific churches and to individuals, James and Peter wrote “general letters”, applicable to any gathering of God’s people in the 1st century. They are also relevant to us in the 21st century.

In Chapter 2 he begins with some practical Godly wisdom about treating fellow Christians equally, no matter their status or personal circumstances. As we find later in the chapter, he is preparing his readers for the real issue behind the presenting hypothetical issue: faith and deeds.

An example of fake faith in action: showing favouritism:

Imagine that two visitors arrived here at church as the Service is about to commence: one arrives in a new shiny Audi, BMW or Merc. He’s well

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dressed, fed and well groomed. Another visitor arrives on foot with shabby clothes, bare feet, an aroma which indicates that he hasn't showered for quite a while and a swag. There are welcomers on the door. How do they react? How would you react?

This is the scenario we find in James Chapter 2. In his illustration, the first visitor is treated well and the second is treated very poorly. The discrimination by the church welcomer is an act of judgement which is ungodly.

James goes on from verse 5 to illustrate that God loves the poor. Many of those who are *poor in the eyes of the world* are *rich in faith* while sometimes it is the wealthy who have exploited the poor and slandered the name of Jesus.

In verse 8, he reminds his readers of the Scripture which says *Love your neighbour as yourself*. Jesus illustrated who a Christian's neighbour is when he told the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. The neighbour was the person in need of help. When we discriminate we are not acting out of love and our faith in God is defective. It is *fake faith*.

In verse 12 and 13 James reminds his readers that all Christians will be held accountable for the way we live out our faith.

The relationship between faith and deeds.

James asks 2 questions in verse 14 which we thought about earlier:

Question 1: *What good is it if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds?*

Note the word *claims*.

Question 2: *Can such faith save him?*

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We need to be clear from the rest of Scripture that we can only be saved from the penalty of our sins by trusting in Jesus' death on our behalf. When we repent of our sin and accept Jesus as our Saviour, then we become a Christian and are 'saved'; saved from hell!

If a person *claims* to be a Christian and has not repented of sin and trusted in Jesus, then they do not have 'saving faith'. They have *fake faith*.

When a person becomes a Christian, they are then to live under the rule or Lordship of Jesus, living a life of obedience to God's Word. Such a life will be reflected in doing good.

Paul writing to Titus in 3:14 says: *Our people (Christians) must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good.*

Jesus said: *Produce fruit in keeping with repentance and by their fruits you will recognise them (the Christians). And Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in Heaven.*

Our Faith is to be seen in action; in good deeds. But good deeds cannot save us! Only Christ's death can save us.

James illustrates this important matter with another hypothetical situation in 2:15-16 (Read out these verses). If our Christian faith does not move us to help our sisters and brothers in situations like this then our faith is *fake*.

In fact, James makes this pronouncement in verse 17: *In the same way, (referring back to his little story in verses 15 and 16) faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.* They are strong words!

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There is much more about faith and works in this chapter, but that's for homework!

Conclusion:

We've thought today about *fake faith*.

We've been reminded that our faith in Christ ought to motivate us to do good for our Christian sisters and brothers as we have opportunity. And there are plenty of opportunities! Naturally, our faith should also move us to do good for not-yet-Christians too. The best thing we can do for them is to help them to come to know the Lord!

How will these words motivate you this week to be doing good?