

Christ Reformation Church

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A Faith that Works ***The Epistle of James***

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. (2:24)

“Seeing This Life Through Faith’s Eyes”

May 10, 2015

Sermon Text: James 1:9ff

Scripture Reading: Luke 12:13-34

Introduction-

The theme we have stated for this epistle of James is *a faith that works*. James, the brother of the Lord, applies the outlook of genuine faith to life and often challenges his audience in regard to the authenticity of their professed faith. We all need this challenge and for the genuine Christian, James’

challenges end in encouragement. If we really do know Christ, then we will indeed see our faith working itself out in visible ways.

James then looks at various areas of our lives and shows us how we see them through the eyes of faith:

- Prayer
- Wealth
- Temptation
- Holiness vs unrighteousness
- The tongue
- The poor and the rich
- The role of good works
- The world
- Suffering

How does genuine faith see these issues of life? What does false faith look like in contrast?

We have seen that James jumped right into his theme in the opening verses:

James 1:1-8 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes in the

Dispersion: Greetings. (2) Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, (3) for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. (4) And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (5) If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. (6) **But let him ask in faith**, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

But let him ask in faith.

At verse 9 James moves on, still applying faith, to another issue of life – the poor and the rich. This is a subject that James will come back to repeatedly and in some very forceful terms. And specifically he is addressing poor and rich who profess to be Christians. Those of low position and those of high position.

Listen to what he says later on in chapters 2 and 5 in regard to this matter of the rich and the poor in the church:

James 2:1-7 My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. (2) For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, (3) and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," (4) have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (5) Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? (6) But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? (7) Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

And again –

James 5:1-6 Come now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. (2) Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. (3) Your gold and silver have corroded, and their corrosion will be evidence

against you and will eat your flesh like fire. You have laid up treasure in the last days. (4) Behold, the wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, are crying out against you, and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts. (5) You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence. You have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter. (6) You have condemned and murdered the righteous person. He does not resist you.

Today many experts would tell James that he has “issues” and needs to chill out! No, WE need to heat up in our indignation against this kind of wickedness.

Let’s come back then to 1:9-11,

James 1:9-11 Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, (10) and the rich in his humiliation, because like a flower of the grass he will pass away. (11) For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Let the lowly *boast* in → his exaltation

Let the rich *boast* in → his humiliation

Faith sees with accuracy. Faith keeps this world and our position in it in eternal perspective. In Christ the lowly Christian – in those days perhaps the slave – can take firm hold by faith of his *exaltation*. He has been raised up with Christ! He is on an equal plane with all the rest of God’s people, having a full inheritance and all the blessings heaven can pour out.

In many eras of history and in various cultures still today there are assortments of caste systems. People are born into lowliness or privilege. Some such systems are formal, and the castes even have names – such as in India (that has lessened in the more metropolitan areas now). Other “caste” or class systems are informal, enforced by economics or social laws. You have the nobility and you have the serfs. Generally, men have exalted themselves over women in most social systems.

The gospel levels all this-

Galatians 3:28-29 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (29) And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

And James here is reminding us that there is no poor man or rich man in

Christ's kingdom. This truth has already begun in the church today and will be brought to full completeness in the new heavens and earth. "Come and buy without money."

So now faith sees the new creation and life in it. James says that the lowly brother is really exalted. He can "boast" in who he now is in Christ and the treasure that is his. He really does have a mansion with his name on it. He looks ahead to his inheritance which is greater than any inheritance the most wealthy "heirs to a fortune" have on this present earth.

In the same way, faith gives the rich man perspective – humility. It enables him to see that his present life in this old creation is going to pass by like a flower that quickly blooms and then is gone.

We have a flowering cherry tree in our yard that blossomed this year more heavily than it ever has. People would see it and comment on it. But now, just a few short weeks later, it is a plain old unnoticeable tree. All the blossoms are gone. That is how the temporal "glory" of the rich man is. Look at verse 11 again—

James 1:11 For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the grass; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. So also will the rich man

fade away in the midst of his pursuits.

Faith believes this and orders one's life accordingly. Faith is a great *leveler* by which the lowly brother is exalted and the rich brother is humbled.

Notice that phrase "in the midst of" his pursuits. *This very night your soul is required of you.* Faith sees this present world and life for the brevity that it is. It gives us perspective. It enables us not to be seduced by the world, which is passing away and all who love it –

1 John 2:15-17 Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (16) For all that is in the world--the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions--is not from the Father but is from the world. (17) And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Faith sees this. Faith knows that this is coming:

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 (13) But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. (14) For since we believe

that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (15) For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. (16) For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. (17) Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (18) Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Faith Enables Persevering in Trials

Now, what does faith do when hard times come? Trials? James tells us-

James 1:12 Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.

Faith perseveres because faith, looking ahead to the promises of God, knows that this life is not “as good as it gets” for Christ’s people. This “remaining

steadfast” and this “perseverance” is *perseverance in faith* and its reward is eternal life, here called “the crown of life.” For example:

Romans 2:6-8 He will render to each one according to his works: (7) to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; (8) but for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury.

1 Corinthians 9:23-27 I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (24) Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it. (25) Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. (26) So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. (27) But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

2 Timothy 4:7-10 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (8) Henceforth there is laid up for me

the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. (9) Do your best to come to me soon. (10) For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.

Revelation 2:10-11 Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. (11) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who conquers will not be hurt by the second death.'

It is a conqueror's crown, and it is eternal life. Not just eternal in duration, *but in quality*. It is the new heavens and the new earth. It is the resurrection and our new bodies fit for eternity. Faith lays hold of these things. In contrast, false faith looks back at and yearns for Sodom, like Lot's wife. As soon as trials and troubles come, false faith withers and dies and goes back to the world. Faith gets on the ark. False faith loves the world that is about to perish.

False Faith Blames God

Now, here is another possible and common response to trials –

James 1:13-15 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. (14) But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. (15) Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

This verb "to tempt" can mean "to test" in these positive sense of God testing His people (Abraham on the mountain), or negatively of man putting God to the test. It can also mean "to tempt to sin" and the context here clearly shows that this is its meaning here.

8.308 πειράζω ; ἐκπειράζω ; πειρασμός, οὗ *m*: to endeavor or attempt to cause someone to sin - 'to tempt, to trap, to lead into temptation, temptation.'

Now, why would anyone who is being tempted to sin make such a claim? Perhaps it is something like Paul talks about in Romans 9 –

Romans 9:17-20 For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (18) So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills. (19) You will say to me then, "Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?" (20) But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me like this?"

"Well, if God is sovereign and decrees all that comes to pass, then He has decreed that I be tempted to sin right now. And how can you or anyone expect me not to sin if God has decreed it?"

Faith rules this out as a possibility. Faith believes things that God has revealed to us, even when sometimes those truths are incomprehensible and seem contradictory. Think of some examples:

- God's sovereignty and man's free will
- God decrees everything that comes to pass, yet he does so without any participation in sin.
- God elects His people to salvation in eternity past, and yet His people must repent and

believe, and those who reject Him will perish with no basis for blaming God.

Faith does not distort God's sovereign and eternal reign of all His creation, and use it as an excuse for sin. God's very essence and being preclude Him from ever tempting us to sin:

James 1:13 Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.

God is holy, holy, holy. Evil has no place in His being. God cannot sin. He cannot even be tempted to sin. Now this is interesting as it relates to the temptation of Christ. This is another mystery. We know this:

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

The temptation of Christ was real, and yet Christ was without sin. Not only did He not yield to sin in action, but He did not even sin in thought or in emotion. His divine nature could not sin or even be tempted to sin. His human nature could be tempted even then to the point of being able to

understand now our infirmities when we are tempted to sin. It is a mystery which we believe by faith. And we don't come back and say "God is tempting me with evil." Never, ever in the gospel record do we see Jesus conducting some kind of divine "sting operation" whereby He lured people into sin. Never.

In fact, here is what really is happening when we are tempted to sin. Listen to James again:

James 1:14-15 But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. (15) Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

It is interesting here that James doesn't mention the world and the devil as sources of temptation. He focuses on our flesh. He places the responsibility squarely where it belongs – on the person being tempted.

Notice the deadly chain of events we must be on guard against:

Desire → Conception → birth of sin
→ sin grows up → death

Do you see what James is doing? He is personifying our sin as a conceived infant in the womb of our body. It is conceived when it takes a root in us

and eventually it is birthed as sin. Then this thing is going to grow and when it is fully grown, it kills us.

Here is real wisdom. Look at this chain of events. *At what point do you suppose it is easiest for us to stop this evil progression?* Note that at each developmental stage, sin is growing stronger in us. Until it masters a person and leads them to hell. It is Christ's Spirit in the believer that enables the Christian to put to death

Romans 8:13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Kill the desire/lust before it can even be conceived and take root in you.

Conclusion

In fact, what we DO receive from the Lord is as opposite from temptation to evil as possible:

James 1:16-18 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. (17) Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (18) Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

See it? *Do not be deceived.* Not by ourselves, not by others, not by the devil. The truth is that everything we receive from the Lord is good. James is addressing “my beloved brothers” here. Every good gift in this life, every perfect gift...is from the Lord. Everything He sends our way is pure, with no evil in it at all. Quite the opposite of the accusation that He tempts us to evil!

Notice this very interesting and beautiful title: *The Father of lights.* God is the origin of all light. “Let there be light” – both physical and spiritual. He overcomes darkness by His word. That is how he “brought us forth” as His own creatures in Christ.

That is to say, God as the Father of lights, gives birth to *light*, not darkness. Good, not evil. In fact He is such pure light (holiness, sinlessness) that it is impossible for even a *shadow* of evil to be cast in Him.

Faith holds to these truths in the face of trials and temptations. Faith does not accuse God. Faith ends in eternal life. Sin ends in death.