

## **THE FULL FAMILY CHURCH**

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**SERIES : JAMES (4) - Faith and Good Works.**

In this series on James, the younger brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have seen during the past few sermons how the author of this letter – which probably was the first letter in the New Testament – wrote it as a word analysis and deeper insight into the words and teaching our Lord Jesus Christ shared with His disciples and people here on earth.

In the first part we read how James spoke about the advantages of suffering. Why God allows this to happen in our lives in the process of strengthening our faith. He then spoke on our attitude towards poor as well as the affluent people. In how we should treat everybody in the same way and not look down on other people through pride. Also that the trials in our lives do not come from God but are often the results of our own bad choices. Yet, when we know that we have made good choices, we should realise that we also live in a sinful world where things go wrong and fairness and reasonability do not always prevail.

James also echoes the words of Jesus when he advises us to place a guard to our mouths and to refrain from gossip and slandering our fellow brothers and sisters. He also states clearly (and it was not James' recommendation, but that of Jesus) that we should obey the Royal Law. That Law of grace which our King, Jesus instated prior to His ascension: "that we should love our neighbour as we love ourselves." Because by doing that the world will see that we are His disciples and followers. About this love Paul elaborates in 1 Corinthians 13 where he gives an excellent analysis on the way in which the love of Jesus operates.

Today we get to the last part of chapter 2. Let us read together from verse 14-26.

The issue that James touches on here is something that had been pulled out of perspective by many faith groups throughout the ages.

Already here in verse 14 we see that James focuses our attention on that we do not belong to a secret, underground organisation. No, this is the kind of faith that has to be out in the open and has to be applied in all walks of life. Even there where others would give you a strange look when you witness about it. This is not kind of faith that is merely reserved to Sunday Church and Care Group sessions. It was also meant to be applicable during our recreation and there where have fellowship and at work. In fact everywhere.

Jesus never worked under cover when He was on earth. He performed all his miracles and preaching out in the open where everybody could see Him and His

works. And if our Lord Jesus was of the opinion that it was the right way to do it, then it would surely be the way He intended us to do it.

James feels so strongly about this that he advises to regard the way we live out our faith so seriously, that it becomes in itself the witness that we have been saved.

James points out that the fact that your faith leads to good deeds that are visible, actually becomes the witness that you have been saved. If people cannot see the fruit of your works in your life, they will be not able to see that you have been saved. This is also often the difference in the lives of people pretending to be saved from those that have truly been saved. Saved people have a yearning to do good works, while those who pretend to be saved, recoil from good works.

Now we have to understand that good works in itself is not an indication that one have been saved. Many Muslims, Hindu's and even Atheists are good people and do a lot for the community and nature conservation. Yet, the works that James refer to here, involve Godly caring works. These are the kind of works wherein people who do not know you, can see the radiating love of Christ. That you are not interested in receiving honour and gratitude – not to be recognised. But because you do it in the Name of Jesus, in fact for Him, reward is not an issue. It is about the privilege to have the opportunity to do it.

He makes use of an excellent example in verses 15 and 16.

How often do we get in contact with someone and say to that person let me pray for you. The person is starving or freezes up. But we pray! And then we send that person away hungry and cold of whatever the case might be.

Now, the question we have to ask ourselves is: what would Jesus do in this case? Would Jesus quote a Bible verse for this person or say a prayer and then send him/her away? Surely not. Jesus would have fed or heal that person first of all and then serve the redeeming Word of God's grace to that person.

Have a look at the four Gospels again and see what Jesus did. Every time a sick, hungry or discomforted person came to Him, He first of all addressed the deficiency or discomfort. As soon as that was out of the way, He applied the spiritual supplement. You see, Jesus was well aware of the fact that sick, hungry and needy people could not receive the Word. Their main focus was on their greatest physical needs. And those kind of needs close our spiritual ears, eyes, and hearts. We have to get rid of the hindrances first before we can feed them spiritual food for their hearts.

James states it clearly in verse 19 that by merely confessing to people that you believe in God and is therefore saved, means nothing. Note, says he: "Demons also believe it – and they shudder of fear!" Demons know the Scripture better than you and I!

In verse 21 James speaks about the practical side of our faith and refers to the great people of faith throughout the history of the Bible. He starts off with Abraham, right at the beginning. How his faith proceeded into actions. Deeds of obedience. And this is the key word we have to remember here. **Obedience**. Abraham knew very well that you may not sacrifice your first born on an altar. In fact God hated it because the heathen nations in that vicinity sacrificed their first borns to the idol, Molech. That was an abomination in God's eyes. Therefore Abraham knew without a doubt he that he was commanded to do with his son Isaac what the heathen nations would have done. Something God hated.

Yet, this proves that Abraham's faith was infallible. Abraham recognised the voice of God. He had a close relationship with God. He knew God was testing his faith by commanding him to sacrifice his covenant child he and Sarah had at an advanced age. This son that God promised him would provide him descendants. This was the son he had to offer.

Abraham never doubted for a moment. He never argued or rationalised or tried to deviate by trying to ascribe God's request to that of the devil. He did not shoo the devil because he knew God spoke with him.

But in his faith, on his way to sacrifice his son, he also knew that God would provide. He believed undoubtedly that God would provide a replacement for his child's life. His faith was so strong that he even believed that God would even raise his son from the dead if he had to kill his son with the sacrificial dagger.

Because Abraham proved to be obedient, and absolutely focussed on what God wanted, the miracle took place. God provided a substitute: a ram from a nearby shrub. And his son, Isaac, from whom the nation of God was to be born, was spared. Only because Abraham was obedient. His only passion was to please God all the way, despite the consequences.

God is not reluctant to refer to Abraham in the Bible as the Father of all Believers. It was his FAITH, his OBEDIENCE that earned him this title. And how did he earn this? In that his faith proceeded into obedience. This is all Jesus expects of us today: obedience. If we are obedient, we will DO what he required of us. Did you hear that word? DO. That does not mean to sit down and to philosophy about the Trinity, or whether one should be baptised as an infant or an adult, or whether we should or should not make use of shooter glasses during communion. God looks into our hearts and whether we are obedient. This means that we should get up and DO the things Jesus asks from us.

James uses another moving example: that of Rahab, the prostitute. In verse 25 we read that Rahab assisted the spies to escape from the soldiers who wanted to kill them. Rahab, the prostitute, the woman of dubious values, the woman all people looked down upon, the one who generated an income in a wrong way. She of all people! God acquits her based on her deeds of obedience to His will. She saw the bigger picture through God's eyes.

In the old Catholic Church the church leaders took these sections of James quite seriously. In such a way that they gave it an unfortunate twist. They went so far as to proclaim that your deeds should **precede** your faith. In fact they believed that you could be saved through your deeds and that faith was to follow later.

This is not what James teaches. You need to be born again in the first instance. Saved, as James says. After that your deeds are to follow. Not the other way around.

It is so tragic that through centuries and centuries the most wonderful cloisters for nuns and monks were built. These people were so occupied with the things of God that they never got to the God of the things. Satan can keep you so busy with church and spiritual activities that you can miss your fellowship and relationship with God. The focus should first of all be on God. The Royal Law states the order of priority clearly: "You should love the Lord your God with your whole heart, your whole soul and all your energies. And the second, equal to this, is that you should love your neighbour the way you love yourself."

It was Martin Luther who first realised the incorrect order in the church. He himself was a monk in the Catholic Church. Yet he was obedient to what Jesus revealed to him. This was the moment that gave birth to the Reformation. Precious, because this has brought the correct perspective to our understanding of the Royal Law.

But this great Reformist also knew, faith in itself meant nothing. Our deeds should follow as a witness of our rebirth.

The Lord looks into our hearts when we do good deeds. You can fool many people, but you cannot fool God.

So, let's get this right. Only then can we be sure of our place in heaven with Jesus. Then we can do good deeds flowing from our thankfulness that we have been redeemed and saved from eternal damnation. To live a life of thankfulness, and a life in which people who have not been saved yet, can see that we are followers and disciples of Jesus because we are obedient to His Royal Law. That Law that request that we should love our neighbour the way we love ourselves. But first of all, that we should love the Lord our God with our whole heart, the whole of our soul and all of our energy. First the relationship with Jesus our Mediator who paid the last price through His precious blood, and then our obedience – our free willing service to love our neighbours as we love ourselves.

## **HOW TO GET SAVED**

If you have not yet accepted the Lord Jesus as your personal Saviour, I would like to give you the opportunity to do that right now. Jesus says in Revelations, "Listen, I knock at the door. If you open, I will come and sup with you."

This is His promise. He loves you and cares for you. He even died for you. Therefore He would love to include your name in the Book of Life. This Book is the official record that will determine whether you will gain entry into heaven one day.

So, my dear friend, if you would like to pray this miraculous prayer, I would love to lead you in this. Remember Jesus is with you right now. He is knocking on the door of your heart. Open up for Him. He cares and means well. Do not procrastinate. Tomorrow might be too late.

If you are serious about this, read this prayer through once so that you are familiar with the context. Then say the prayer a second time from your heart. Believe it with your whole heart and say it out loud. Just there where you are. The Lord Jesus hears you now. He is serious about you. Be serious about this invitation.

Pray with me. Say:

"Lord Jesus, I realise that I am a sinner, and without you I can never be saved. I now pray, Jesus, that you will enter my heart. That you will take your rightful place in my life and that you will accept me as your child. Please forgive my sin. I now take you on your Word and believe that you have died for my sin. I thank you, Lord, that you have accepted me as your child. I believe this because I know that you are a God of truth. Thank you that from now on I can learn how to be obedient to what you want in my life. I praise your holy Name, Jesus. Thank you. Amen."

Well, if you prayed this prayer and really meant what you've just prayed; I can assure you that I will see you in heaven one day. Congratulations, you are now a heavenite. You have changed your address from hell to heaven! You are a saved, redeemed child of God! This is the greatest miracle that could ever happen to you! Amazing!

Please realise that this is an act of faith. You took Jesus on His Word by believing that He is serious about what He says. Your faith saves you.

There is no necessity to experience any funny feelings or emotions. Faith is something that happens in your heart (you believe) and in your mind (you decide it).

Now that you are a true Christian, I would advise you to:

- Join a good Bible based church where you can be led in the Word of God.
- Share your experience with your pastor or church leader. Even a friend. Remember your witness about this most amazing moment ever in your whole life could save someone else as well. Wouldn't you love that?!

- Study the Bible regularly and pray to Jesus as often as possible so that you can build a strong relationship with the Lord Jesus. He desires a great personal relationship with you too.

I pray that your spiritual journey with God will be just as fulfilling as it is for me.

If you need any assistance or just want to share this moment with me, you are welcome to contact me. I would gladly hear from you and would like to pray for you as well.

God bless you.

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