

LIFE GROUP LESSON

THE BOOK OF JAMES - FAITH WORKS - WEEK OF OCT. 18

Goal: To understand when it comes to spiritual growth, there are no short-cuts; faith must be sustained. A living faith in Christ is sustained by putting faith into action daily.

Opening Discussion:

- Explain 'there are no short-cuts' when it comes to a meaningful lifelong relationship?
- Though at times we may think a 'microwave' faith might be helpful, there are no short-cuts when it comes to the Christian Walk, sustainable faith, and a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Have you found this to be true?
- Big action (to be noticed or awarded accolade/position) rarely produces big faith. It is the small, daily (sometimes boring) acts of faith that overtime make us bigger on the inside. Then, when challenges or testing and temptation come our way, a big real faith will surface because we have been 'practicing' our faith consistently ... getting bigger on the inside. How do you respond in times of crisis or difficulty?

The Author and Audience

James was the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, and as leader of the Church in Jerusalem, he writes this letter circa 44-49 AD to Jewish believers scattered by persecution. James addresses them as the 'twelve tribes' speaking to how Christianity is a continuation of God's covenant promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis 12:3b). James wants these Jewish believers to know faith in Christ unites them, even though a great wave of persecution has resulted in further dispersion (see Acts 7:59 – 8:1).

Background

From the days of Egyptian bondage (Hebrews' exodus from Egypt circa 1270 BC), invasion of Assyria into Israel (722 BC), and Babylonian exile of Judeans (586 BC) ... persecution, exile, and oppression are recurring themes for the people of Israel. As James writes these Jewish believers in the 1st Century – descendants of Abraham who have placed their hope in the risen Christ, Jesus of Nazareth – they find that their faith brings suffering yet again. This time at the hands of their own Jewish people (Acts 12:1-3, 13:50, 23:20-21; Galatians 4:29).

Yet, instead of forsaking their history, heritage (their Jewishness), James calls the Jewish believers to recall and honor the bigger purpose behind the Law of God and his purpose over Israel: " ... look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it" (James 1:25). The bigger picture of God's promise to Abram was for all families of the earth to be blessed through his Seed, the Christ of God, Jesus Messiah, heir to David's throne (Genesis 12:1-3; Luke 1:31-33; Galatians 3:16).

Read James 1:1-18

Faith is not passive. Faith is ACTIVE!

- "When troubles come your way, consider it an opportunity for great ____" (v2). According to vv3-4, the outcome of enduring stress and duress is growth and development of a big faith. Hopefully, this brings us joy. Is knowing that you are being perfected and being made more into the image of Christ a motivator for living your faith? Read together – "God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him" (James 1:12).
- What does James say about wisdom, according to v 5; what does he say about being 'settled' in God alone, vv 6-8? How can we part with 'divided loyalty'?
- God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone to do wrong, according to v13. Where does temptation come from, according to vv14-15?

Consider This

In the Lord's Prayer, when we pray 'lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil', we can rest assured that the Lord will not lead us into temptation. He will instead lead us away from evil and the Evil One. But we must make sure we follow his lead, and not 'look around', get off-path or 'look back' as Lot's wife did, for that may very well be an example of divided loyalty (see Genesis 19:23-26).

Also, when James reminds readers/listeners that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning" (v17 NKJV), he is saying God is consistent. We are not going to wake up one day and find the Lord in a bad mood. He consistently and persistently loves us and is for us. He proved this by sending his Son to take upon himself the wrath our sin deserves.

faith WORKS

Text: James 1

Plain Truth:

Salvation comes by _____ through
_____. And by _____, we
_____ our faith.

1. _____ actions, rarely produce _____ faith.
It's the _____, _____ acts.

a. Authentic _____ does appear
_____, but it will _____ you so you
can _____ the race God has for you.

b. Consistency builds _____ during the
_____ times

2. Faith without _____ isn't worth _____.

3. _____ matter, so faith can _____
without _____.

Just as God created the sun, moon, stars, and all lights of the heavens on the fourth day (Genesis 1:14-19) God's light has come into this world to defeat death. Jesus said, "God's light came into the world, but people loved darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants" (John 3:19b-21; see also Matthew 5:14-16).

Read James 1:19-27

James reminds Christ-followers to be quick to listen but slow to speak. And slow to get angry. Anger is a real emotion, but "Human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires" (v20). How may we assess and align our emotion of anger into alignment with our Lord and Savior, who is HOLY and worthy of all glory and honor ... the One whose anger produces what is good and right and true for all people who call upon his name? Our part is to do what James says: "... get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls" (v21). Refer to the following Scriptures and jot down one take-away from each re: God's wrath and anger:

Matthew 7:1-5 Psalm 94:1-12 Revelation 19:11-16 Hebrews 12:24-29

In Closing

We are called to worship the Lord in holy fear and awe. Worship is key to daily aligning our lives (heart, soul, mind, body) with God's redemptive movement in the world. Like these early Jewish believers to whom James writes, we live in a culture that flows counter to the ways of God. In many respects, we too are dispersed. Think of it: John the Baptist, the one who came in the spirit and power of Elijah, the one sent to prepare the way for the Lord's coming, was not recognized ... "they chose to abuse him. And in the same way they will also make the Son of Man suffer" (Jesus' words in Matthew 17:11-12).

Thus, move from being a 'hearer' of the Word to being a 'Doer' of the Word. Resolve today, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to live your faith. James says: "Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you" (v27). In other words, roll up your sleeves and get your hands dirty helping others and serving people in the name of Christ. This will keep us from the corruption of this world getting us dirty.

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