

'The Book of James: A Discipleship MOT' series

Serving Christians in a life following Christ since AD 60.

People's Church Partington www.peopleschurch.co.uk

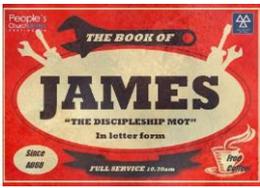
Faith Works : James 2 v 14 - 26

We're working through the book of James as an opportunity for a bit of an MOT on our discipleship, our following Jesus. In the past few weeks through James 1 we've looked at perseverance, trials and temptation, what we do with what goes into us. Last week and this week we're in James 2 and we're really looking at what comes out of us. And this morning we're on the hot topic of faith and works...what does a life of faith look like? What does James say about this? And what would God want to say to us through this? So we're going to get straight into the passage, and then we'll try to unpack it a bit

What good is it, my brothers and sisters,[e] if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can such faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder. 20 Do you want to be shown, you senseless person, that faith apart from works is barren? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham justified by works when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was brought to completion by the works. 23 Thus the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,'" and he was called the friend of God. 24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the prostitute also justified by works when she welcomed the messengers and sent them out by another road? 26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.

There's some verses in the passage we've just heard that may stick out like a bit of a sore thumb. 'You see a person is considered righteous (or in some translations, 'justified' by what they do and not by faith alone'.



'The Book of James: A Discipleship MOT' series

Serving Christians in a life following Christ since AD 60.

People's Church Partington www.peopleschurch.co.uk

You might hear that and think *'hang on a minute this seems to go against the very Gospel I responded to— that it's not based on works – what I do, that I'm saved by grace, that I receive the good news that Jesus died for my sin and I believe that's for me, and I'm saved...*

In another part of the New Testament, Paul the apostle wrote to the Christians in Rome and said to them 'we maintain a person is justified by faith APART from works of the law' and yet here James sounds like he's saying a person is justified by what they do not by faith alone' so you've got 2 verses that at first hearing almost sound like they might contradict each other but I think as we get on and get into the passage we'll get to see what James is trying to say....

Just as we get started and to get us thinking, we've got a little quiz to get us going – the quiz is called 'name that tree' , not like 'let's call it Stan' or something like that but name the variety and type of tree ok - so here's the first one....

Name that tree? Anyone? – Apple tree

What about this one? - orange tree

What about this one? – banana tree

What about this one? - grapevine

Final round What about this one? Anyone?

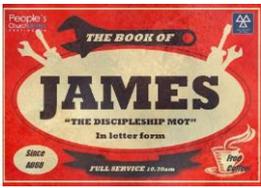
Here it is again in slightly zoomed inanyone? -

We don't know what it is do we? We don't know....

Where's the fruit?! How do we know what sort of tree it is when we can't see the fruit? Or the leaves? Or any sign of life? What sort of tree is this? It's a dead tree....that's what it is

The point **I believe** James is making is one that builds on the words of Jesus in Matthew 7 - we read,

You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit.



'The Book of James: A Discipleship MOT' series

Serving Christians in a life following Christ since AD 60.

People's Church Partington www.peopleschurch.co.uk

You will know a tree by it's fruit. I think Here's is the major point that we'll get into a bit more..

.

Faith without evidence of a changed life....is to be questioned! To say we're a Christian without any evidence of a life that reflects our Christian faith and belief is to be challenged....

You say you're an apple tree – show me the fruit. Give me an apple!

You say you're a pear tree? Show me the fruit – rock and roll let's all have a pear

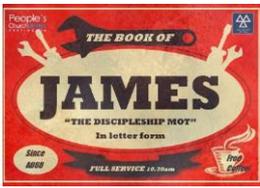
You say you're a Christian? Show me the fruit! How will people know we are a follower of Jesus if our lives, our lifestyles and our actions do not reflect that?

Paul speaks about the fruit of the Spirit of God, present in us, being love, joy, peace, patience, perseverance, gentleness, goodness, kindness, self control....these things are growing in and out-worked in the life of the believer!

I meet people all the time, well, maybe not all the time, but quite a bit of the time who say 'oh yeah I'm a Christian' and you go ok great, are you part of a church 'nah, not really into that' ok so tell me about how you came to faith...' what? Came to faith?' my parents had me done when I was a kid, Santa is really important to me so we love Christmas!' but you aren't part of a church or reading the bible or praying or trying to grow as a follower of Christ? Oh no why would I want to do that? Ok it doesn't sound or look like you're following Jesus – which is being a Christian. Obviously that's the caricature of the conversation but the point is becoming and being a follower of Jesus is about a changed heart....a heart turned away from sin and towards Christ, a heart no longer with self on the throne but with Christ on the throne, submitted to him – a changed heart is evidenced by a changed life.

You will know a tree by its fruit. This is real life - I read this earlier this week:

"When I was in youth group (many years ago) there was a poster on the wall of a judge with the caption 'If you were accused of being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?' I was reminded of this sitting in an immigration court last week where the judge had opened proceedings saying 'If I find Mr x (Mr x is not his real name) is a Christian I will



'The Book of James: A Discipleship MOT' series

Serving Christians in a life following Christ since AD 60.

People's Church Partington www.peopleschurch.co.uk

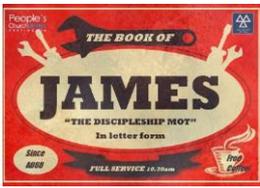
allow his appeal for leave to remain.' There followed 2 hours of the Home Office quizzing and questioning to see if my Iranian brother in Christ really is a Christian, and myself (with the help of a barrister) trying to prove that he was....'

There are Christians in this country, who are here because it's a safer place to be alive and to be a Christian, and ministers up and down the country are standing side by side with these brothers and sisters of middle eastern heritage appealing to the on their behalf – look at their life, look at their changed lives, look at the difference Christ has made, look at the positive impact they are having on their community – look a life changed by the love of Jesus. Look at the fruit. Our faith crosses cultural and ethnic boundaries it's not about being white British or if we know the answers to the right questions - It's a changed heart, which is evidenced by a changed life. A changed life is the overflow of God's Spirit in you that is refining you and overflowing out of you into the world and we have a missionary God, who sent his spirit into our lives and who sends us into all the world...when Christ lives in us, and we let the word take root and grow that fruit starts to overflow out of us.

For Paul the apostle, and for us 'we're justified by faith alone' is true – we are saved by grace, through faith, we're not saved by what we do – we're saved by what Jesus did and our response to that! Works will not save us....

But for James, here he must surely be saying that faith that is genuine leads to a transformed life –which is evidenced by good works: works don't save us but are the evidence of God's saving work in and through you. Subtle but really important difference there. We're not saved by doing good works, we're saved to do good works for the Kingdom. It's the difference between someone saying 'If I train really really hard I'll be good enough to be a Man United player' and knowing you've been signed by the club so you're going to train really really hard.

To say 'Jesus is real' is not enough – James is quite sharp on this he says even the demons believe that Jesus is real! Well done! Making a statement of belief is not it, a life that evidences the grace of God is the outworking of God in your life - Faith WORKS!



'The Book of James: A Discipleship MOT' series

Serving Christians in a life following Christ since AD 60.

People's Church Partington www.peopleschurch.co.uk

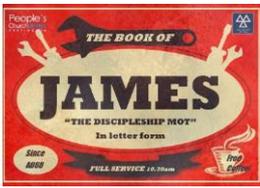
It was really encouraging at our most recent Church Together Night Jemma came up the front and shared a bit of her story of connecting to church then coming to Alpha, and coming to faith and then feeling like she wanted to get involved in helping people who are struggling with debt and stuff, and then Claire came along from CAP the other Sunday and that confirming the desire to get involved - it's like, this is great! This is God at work – a changed heart, and the overflow of God at work saying 'I want to get out there and make a difference', others who have said 'I'd love to get more involved, I'd love to do more' – it's God at work! If you feel like you want to do more, don't be frustrated that 'you're not doing it yet' rejoice that God is at work on the inside, he's growing you, he's shaping your heart, his spirit is at work in you and this is real faith! Because real faith leads to a changed heart, and it's natural that what God has done 'in you and for you' you want him to do in and for others. 'I've experienced this life changing, eternity changing encounter with the living God and I'm going to live in response to that and I'm going to share that in my community and I'm going to go into all the world...

James unpacks it for us with examples from the Old Testament...

Firstly – Faith is not un-moved

If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs

Faith is not 'sounding spiritual' I will pray that God will meet your needs, it's being Christ's hands and feet here on the ground – and yes, sometimes it's not as simple as giving money to everyone who asks you for money, and it's not wanting to be a hero on behalf of other people - But it's something of God's compassion that flows out of you to those around you – who are hungry, who are in genuine need... faith does not remain un-moved when it sees something wrong! When it sees a need... James says look at Rahab the prostitute – she shows us true faith – she saw a people in need and was moved with compassion. But she was a prostitute! Yes she was – but her past is not her future and her compassion, hospitality, and her interaction showed true faith. Don't let your past or your reputation determine how



‘The Book of James: A Discipleship MOT’ series

Serving Christians in a life following Christ since AD 60.

People’s Church Partington www.peopleschurch.co.uk

God can work in and through you in the future – True faith is not unmoved.... And James takes us to Abraham too, as an example of this... 3 really quick headings

V22 – Faith goes hand in hand with works

You see that his faith and his actions were working together

Look at Abraham, - he had faith and his faith led to works...they were working together. Faith contains obedience to God and when God calls you to do something you do it – faith and action go hand in hand, working together in obedience before Christ.

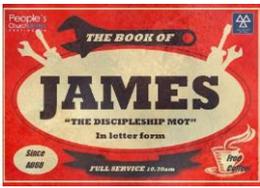
Verse 22,– Faith develops and matures through works

faith was brought to completion by the works. In the first week we spent looking at James we said if we want to be mature we’ve got to get through trials. Here’s another aspect – if we want our faith to be complete, mature, lacking nothing, works is part of that too – work flexes the muscles of faith, grows us, stretches us, takes us out of our comfort zone. Works really do mature our faith because it’s putting belief into action which then causes us to exercise our faith – do I really believe this. If I believe it what does that look like lived out? I believe God cares, this is the God I follow, does my life reflect God cares, how can my life reflect God cares I think the Eden team are one of the best examples of this – God cares, and I’m going to devote my life to living my faith out on the estate to show it. City Centre Ministries is another great example....

Verse 23 is a key one – Third aspect : Faith comes before works

And the scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,,’ and he was called the friend of God

This is how we know James and Paul aren’t at odds with each other... because while James says faith and works go hand in hand, and works complete our faith, he knows the story of Abraham and if we know the story of Abraham we see it too- Abraham believed God – and it was credited to him as righteousness! Abraham believed – and that was enough! But that faith, that belief that God is King and Lord and the one who’s hand is on his life, leads to obedience, leads to works, and these



'The Book of James: A Discipleship MOT' series

Serving Christians in a life following Christ since AD 60.

People's Church Partington www.peopleschurch.co.uk

works develop faith and bring it to maturity. When you've encountered God in the way that Abraham had, it's only natural that obedience and works followed in his life

Because Faith....works!

It's maybe the difference between the married man who knowing he's married, knowing he's loved and who loves his wife, decides he's going to buy her flowers, buy her chocolate, do the dishes, sweep the floor etc – acts of showing his love, knowing he's loved. Rather than the guy who is desperately trying to win the heart of a woman with chocolates, flowers and acts of extravagance – both are doing the same thing, but one knows he's loved, and is responding in love...

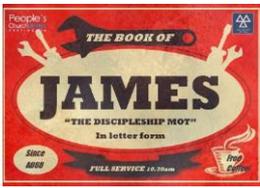
Action follows belief... In what ways is God calling you to exercise faith?

If you were accused of being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you? Do people see the fruit of your faith in your life? What sort of tree will you be?

And – in what ways is God stirring you to works? Where is God calling you to action?

There's so many ways to get involved in making a difference....not to earn faith, but because you have faith and you want to share it.

There's men's ministry, there's ladies' ministry, there's all the stuff the Eden team are doing, there's Christians Against Poverty, there's Safe Families for Children, there's Playdate, there's AdRRes and supporting people through addiction and supporting their families, there's so many opportunities to get involved in sharing the love of God with this community. And actually, some of it doesn't have to be programmed, 'get involved in this ministry, get involved in that ministry' it can be in the really un-programmed sharing the good news, making a difference with your neighbours, with your friends, being a blessing to those who need blessing, making a meal, sending an encouragement. But none of us have been saved to sit on the sidelines and watch others do it. All of us in Christ have got a story to tell of God's goodness, his grace and mercy to us, and all of us are called to share this good news.



'The Book of James: A Discipleship MOT' series

Serving Christians in a life following Christ since AD 60.

People's Church Partington www.peopleschurch.co.uk

It is of course totally possible to do works but have no faith – believing that if we 'do enough to get in' it will tip the balance of God's scales in our favour. Maybe some of us are in that place today. Not yet put our faith in Jesus but thinking 'if I'm a good enough person and I do enough good, God will love me' – 'doing enough' won't get you in...the good news of Jesus is far better than what you currently believe – we weren't good enough but while we were still sinners Christ died for the ungodly! We weren't good enough but God loved us anyway! That's amazing grace!

Jesus died not that we would work hard to earn his affection, but so that we could receive and know his affection, his grace, his mercy, his love... and we could share that with those around us...bringing light to this community and neighbouring communities, in Jesus name.