

Chat with the Children

- Did something about "how do I know cash is real?" - alongside a drama from Jane about favouritism

Three Pigs!

- Once upon a time there were **three pigs**.
- Each decided to build a house...
 - first pig was lazy, so he built his of **straw**...
 - second pig was less lazy, and he built his of **wood**...
 - but the third pig was a hard worker, and he built his house of **bricks**!
- Along came **wolf** - fancied a little bit of pork!
 - came to house of first pig... Huffed, puffed, blew house down!
 - came to house of second pig... Huffed, puffed, blew house down!
 - came to house of third pig... Huffed, puffed, not a lot happened!
- **Straw and twigs did little good** - no real substance to them.
Martin Luther, the great reformer of the 16th Century, called the letter of James "**an epistle of straw**" - without real weight!
- **Why?**
- Because of the apparent contradiction between James chapter two and Paul's clear teaching that we are not saved by works, but by faith alone:
 - (Romans 3:28) "**For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.**"
- *For Christ has done all the work.*
- Is that a true picture?
 - (don't over-draw Luther's suspicions - he knew it was Scripture, but thought it of **less value** than the "**chief books**" such as Romans & Galatians.)
- **What is going on in James 2?**

Context

- James - **pastor to scattered people** - concerned to encourage practical Christian living, to challenge complacency in lifestyle.
- Saw last week the "**key**" of **obedience** - be doers of the word, not hearers only.
- In chapter 2 we have two parts, each of which we'll explore a little:
 - vs.1-13**
 - First of the actual areas of life where that "**doing**" and not merely listening is required - **showing favour to rich, but not poor.**
 - vs.14-26**
 - Second, as if reflecting on that, he comes back to the need for "**doing**"/**obeying in general** - not quite same ground as in chapter one, for he **relates our actions to our justification.**

Favouritism Forbidden (vs.1-13)

- James addresses this very practical area in his typically direct and engaging manner:
- Sets his case out in **four stages**:
 - **v.1** - States the Principle
 - **v.2-4** - Offers a Case study
 - **v.5-7** - Encourages us to act like God in accepting the poor
 - **v.8-13** - Enjoins us to Obey the Royal Law of King Jesus

v.1 - Principle

- **Don't show favouritism** - don't treat people differently because of external things.
 - principle that runs throughout Scripture
 - God shows no partiality - and as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of

God, neither should we.

v.2-4 - Case study

- What kind of partiality did James have in mind?
- Rich man, poor man - public meeting; these are probably not believers.
- Easy to come up with case studies of our own:
 - at church
 - in the office, seniority...
 - not just apparent wealth, but intelligence, behaviour, colour of skin, accent, even the style of dress...

v.5-7 - Act like God in accepting the poor

- First argument against such behaviour is based in the character and nature of God:
 - v.5 "God chose the poor people of this world to be rich in faith and possess the kingdom."
- God chose poor people to be part of his kingdom - so why are you discriminating against them when they come in the door?
- (In some ways very bizarre that they were guilty of this, since they were probably themselves poor - and oppressed by exactly these rich people!! - cf.5:1-6...)
- Not that God chose poor and NOT the rich - but he did choose poor people.
- So James is saying to his readers:
 - "in discriminating against them you are insulting them - and the Lord who called them - the Lord you claim to follow."

v.8-13 - Obey the Royal Law of King Jesus

- Second argument is based on the "Royal Law", the law of the Kingdom, the teaching of King Jesus:
 - (Mark 12:31) "love your neighbour as yourself".
 - its in Leviticus, and Jesus picked it up as a summary statement of all God's requirements on us for the way we should live.
- Our family has a "our house, our rules" principle:
 - Grannie & Grandpa - their house, their rules...!
 - Grandma & Grandad - their house, their rules...!
- **"God's house, God's rules":**
 - we are citizens of the new Kingdom of God - and in this Kingdom, we are to love and treat our neighbour as we would treat ourselves.
- Rather than any kind of favouritism, James' is encouraging the scattered members of his church to live lives of practical care, of real-life love.
- Should be as true of us as it was of them:
 - not just fair, but generous, loving, caring in the way we treat others
 - those who visit here on a Sunday, those over the fence at home, those at the next desk in the office...
- All the way through James' treatment of this subject has been a concern that his readers don't just hear, understand, agree with his ethical position:
 - he is deeply concerned that they translate their belief into action.
 - its that concern that prompts his move away from the particular to the general again:

Faith & Deeds (vs.14-26)

- James turns to examine relationship between our deeds, our actions and our justification/salvation/status before God.
- Its here that Luther's dismissive comment has its force...
 - ...for the great rediscovery of the Reformation was that we do not have to buy our salvation by our deeds, by our actions - indeed, we cannot!

- We are sinners through & through!
- Rather, salvation is by "faith alone".
 - Romans 3:28 "For we maintain that a [person] is justified by faith apart from observing the law."
- Faith - belief in, trust in - Jesus Christ, who has done it all.
 - He is only one who has ever lived a perfect life;
 - He alone does not deserve to die as a sinner;
 - He alone could die to take another's punishment for sin;
 - He alone has broken the power of sin and death and hell;
 - He alone gives salvation - not dependent on our action, but on a response of faith to all he has done for us!
- That's the glorious good news of the gospel!
- But that's not what it sounds like James is saying!
 - (James 2:14) "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?"
- We need to explore what is going on here before it will become any clearer!
 - critically, Paul and James use two central words in slightly different ways:

Faith

- When Paul talks of faith, concept in mind is strongly dynamic one:
 - not a passive assent to some set of beliefs.
- Includes a wholehearted commitment to obedience to the "Royal Law", to God's call on the believer's life.
- For Paul, that is taken as read.
- James, on the other hand, uses the word slightly differently.
- He is attacking those who say they have "faith", but whose "faith" really only involves verbal assent to some set of beliefs.
 - "Yes, I believe that..."
- So, when James wants to say "that's a fake" he needs to say "you need more than empty, shallow assent - real faith inevitably spills over into real life."
 - or, as he puts it in v.17 - "So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead."
- Something called "faith" but which doesn't make any difference to the way we live is not the real faith that Paul had in mind.

Justification

- The other key word that is being used differently is "justified" - "put right with God" is the GNB rendering, in v.24.
- The Greek word is "dikaion", and is related to the word for "righteousness", "dikaiosis".
 - roughly - "the declaration of righteousness," "the becoming righteous."
- That Greek word has a range of meanings:
 - from the initial process of becoming righteous, the transfer from being unrighteous to being righteous (that's way Paul uses it);
 - to the final declaration of righteousness, the verdict at the end of a court case (that's how James uses it).
- So, when Paul is talking about the initial granting of righteous status to a believer, then works, deeds have no part to play - it is all by God's grace through Christ.
- But James is talking of God's final declaration at the end of time over a believer's life - when real faith will have been vindicated by deeds, in action.
- So when James says "it is by his actions that a person is declared (rather than put) right with God":
 - he is dead right - unless our faith makes a difference in our lives, what right have we to call it a real, a living faith?

Application

- That's a hard word for today!
 - some huge percentage of the population say they believe in God - and look at society!

- worse, there are still people who are church members but for whom "faith" just means the verbal assent they gave at the time we took their membership vows - but hardly a glimmer of a living, vital faith!
- Not simply a dig at those who don't come to church regularly:
 - for there are those who can't get out to worship, whose lifestyle is constrained, often by age or ill-health.
 - and it's God's job to judge, not ours.
- But there are also those for whom the excuses poor health, or job and many others are mere excuses, smoke-screens put up to hide the lack of life, the lack of "real faith".
- Perhaps that's even sometimes true of us who come regularly:
 - when God is calling us to wade out deeper into the adventure of faith, to live lives of glorious self-giving love.

Conclusion

- Where does all of that leave us?
- Seeking to live a balanced life:
 - on the one hand, not relying on what we do to save us, not trying to buy our way into God's favour by church attendance, by acts of mercy and care.
 - (Paul's concern)
 - but on the other hand not allowing that to lead us into a kind of passive, inactive, quietist "faith" - one that acknowledges Jesus Christ with our lips, but not with our lives.
 - (James' concern)
- Rather we will dwell secure in the fact that Christ has saved us
 - and live out our intense, joyful, wonderful gratitude in lives of service and love for others.
- There is a one-liner that goes:
 - "If you are a Christian full of love, joy and peace, why don't you tell your face about it?"
- I suppose it's the same idea for the whole of our lives!!
- May God grant us his grace so to do.