

Introduction

- Working our way through James
- Started by wondering **what helped faith grow** - in real life...
 - ...actually **doing it**, putting things into practise.
- I suppose in some ways that begs the question "**what things**", and much of the rest of James' letter is filled with particular areas of life where we need to apply our faith in practical ways:
 - **favouritism, the tongue, attitude to the future, and so on.**
- Final chapter of the letter continues that process.
- I suppose you might describe these as features of a rounded Christian life:
 - aspects you'd hope to find not just in **seedlings**, but in **established, maturing plants**
 - plants that have moved on from **Baby Bio** to **Fertiliser!!**
- **There are three:**
 - **Penitence (vs. 1-6)**
 - **Patience (vs. 7-12)**
 - **Prayer (vs.13-20)**

Penitence (1-6)

- Warning to rich people:
 - in context, probably non-Christian landowners who oppressed people generally
 - and for whom any new movement would be object of suspicion, a potential threat to their livelihood
- **Their riches had taken them in**
 - they saw in them absolute meaning and forgot or neglected justice, compassion, concern for others...
 - ...which doesn't sound much like a penitence!
- This warning, then, is probably here in James for the purpose of:
 - **stopping the church envying those who were rich;**
 - **enabling them to bear the pain of persecution knowing God would bring judgement.**
- That judgement will come about **exactly because those rich people are impenitent**
 - have a careless and casual attitude to the seriousness of sin.
- They simply **don't care about the consequences of their actions, or think they can get away with it.**
 - in particular they are guilty of not paying subsistence wages to poor labourers who literally led a hand-to-mouth existence.
- I see the same attitude in myself:
 - "**it doesn't really matter, I can get away with that...**" (whatever "that" is!)
 - or, "**I won't be found out... the consequences will never catch up with me...**"
- Quite often I see it in this very area of my own life - **am I not rich?**
- Am I not near the top of the riches and power scale? Do I not have a disposable income incomparably greater than the vast majority of people in the world today?
- Do I not turn a blind eye to the exploitation of workers and economies that brings fruit and tea and coffee and oil and many other basic "**necessities**" of life to my local supermarket or petrol station?
- I simply choose not to care, imagining I can do nothing!
 - (Fair Trade tea & coffee, campaigning through, for example, Tear Fund...)
- Not just wrt riches, but in other areas of life too, **we all have areas where we can be impenitent**
 - **sapping to faith.**
 - **hardening of the heart.**
- Need to confront it - **at heart of our faith is a confession of sin, a turning for forgiveness from someone whose hands are clean.**

- If we stop seeing sin, we start to rely on ourselves:
 - we say in our hearts "I can do this"...
 - we can't - we must always be ready to turn in penitence, in repentance for otherwise we cannot receive the forgiveness Jesus offers.
- Neglecting this is like cutting at the roots of our faith...

Patience (7-12)

- We are an instant generation!
 - meals - MacDonalds - microwaves - "for Mash get Smash"!!!
 - travel - motorways, high speed trains, planes
 - communications - mobile phones, faxes, not just Internet but Broadband...
 - worship - did a search on the word "patience" in hymns and songs on my computer (of which there are 2872, though same song in different books) - 13 songs in total, in all of CH3, Mission Praise, Songs & Hymns of Fellowship and update; only 4 of those are in the more modern books!!
- Patience is not one of our societal virtues!
 - we are not prepared to wait for things to develop.
 - we have to understand instantly, learn instantly, be trained instantly.
 - eg, little place for the apprenticeship - not just skills, but time and space to learn from a master of their craft - companies seem to lack the patience...
- Contrast with James' call for patience!
 - here mostly patience in the face of suffering & persecution.
 - be patient and wait for Jesus' return - near now as then!
- Examples:
 - farmer waiting for crops to grow, waits for right rains etc
 - prophets who persevered despite opposition
- Such patience speaks of, indicates a reliance on God, a trust in him and his timing and way of doing things.
- That too is something we lack in our Christian lives.
- We've been taken in by this "now" generation, and assumed we can become instantly mature Christians:
 - this conference, that weekend, this experience, that blessing...
- God doesn't normally work that way - sometimes, yes, but not normally.
- God's way is to plant seeds, to see them grow and develop and blossom and fill out.
 - door hanger: "Have patience - God hasn't finished with me yet!"
- Compare learning to read or write or walk or talk - don't remember each lesson, only ended up able to do it.
- Often God works like that, helping us grow over time...
- Implies be patient with ourselves sometimes.
- But also continue to look for growth - patient, not dead!
- One particular implication is to be patient with one another: v.9
 - (GNB) "Do not complain against one another, my brothers, so that God will not judge you."
 - (NIV) "Don't grumble against one another, brothers, or you will be judged."
- With each others habits, weaknesses, failings...
- Not blind to sin, but patient with weakness.
- Penitence, patience, ...

Prayer (13-20)

- Final word James addresses to his beloved brothers, his scattered flock, is about maintaining their relationship with God, their conversation, their contact.
- Prayer.

- All sort of dimensions:
 - self in trouble; (v.13)
 - self been blessed; (v.13)
 - sick; (v.14)
 - sinned; (v.16)
- All this is suggestive of a **transparency of relationship with God** - we bring him everything, whatever we are facing, good times, bad times, fearful times, joyful times - they all come to God.
- There is power here - not just in the supernatural, though that is there, but also to heal and restore relationships...
 - ... **confession**, honesty with God **spills over into honesty with each other**.
- **Alan and I praying together** in years past - built up our faith enormously... rare individual - take step of trust and honesty.

Conclusion

- How conclude?
- Let's take up James' challenge to be doers of the word, not hearers only:
 - to be those who are **penitent**, prepared to admit we get it wrong, to say we are sorry, and to turn away from those attitudes and actions that are wrong.
 - to be characterised by **patience** - to work at it in every area of our lives, with family, at work - and with ourselves, and God too as he deals with us in his own perfect timing.
 - to be those who **pray**, in all circumstances - who express our dependence on God concretely, who express our delight in him, our thanks... in prayer ...and who learn anew of his faithfulness and love as he answers.
- **Tend our faith like a plant, carefully fertilise it, water it**
 - and see God bring forth his fruit!