

Chat with the Children: The Real Thing

- Coins, find the one that won't buy you anything in the shops across the road...
- All sorts of things help us to grow as Christians:
 - reading Bible, praying, and all the things we've been thinking about in James - putting into practise being careful of what we say, not showing favouritism, trusting God for the future, looking after those in need, ...
 - but there are also things which will not help us grow into mature Christians, things that might at first sight seem helpful...
- Need to be discerning, showing practical wisdom:
 - teach bank tellers to recognise false currency...
 - get them to handle the real stuff lots!
- Guard against getting taken in and being "blown and tossed by the wind."?
 - handle the real stuff, the stuff of obedience, the stuff that marks out a mature Christian life, the kind of stuff we're thinking about today...

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.
- 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!