

FULL-CREAM DISCIPLESHIP:
GIVING THE WORLD A TASTE OF LIVING FAITH IN ACTION
James 2:14-26
October 20th, 2013

One of the best loved desserts is strawberries topped with cream—whipped, clotted, poured, doesn't matter but cream—do you agree? Now the strawberries can be more or less luscious, but oh how disappointing to see this dessert on a menu and find that the cream-treat you were looking forward to turns up as that artificial cream which tastes like sweetened, heated plastic which has been cooled! No doubt, strawberries can be delicious by themselves, but cream, real fresh cream, really 'makes' that dish, in my opinion.

James wants believers to show the world what true, living, saving faith looks like.

Christians were facing pressures, this we know. They made exclusive claims to knowing truth about God and James now tackles this question of their need to show the difference that having such true faith makes in their lives—not just talking about it.

Faith in Christ should be expressed in practical action not only cherished within one's personality—that's the heart of today's message.

This teaching further explains what James said about 'caring for widows' and staying pure.

James' words are aimed to mature the way his readers, as brothers and sisters, both understood the Gospel and lived it.

This is another internal issue that they were facing: there appears to have been the growth of an imbalanced, un-coordinated approach to the faith—like a model only choosing to wear one half of the provided outfit onto the cat-walk. In the words of that famous ad-campaign of a decade ago, James says:

"Fools! Don't you know that 'this goes with that, goes with this, goes with that, goes with this, goes with that in our lives?'" A coordinated faith, one that models the entire outfit which God has provided for us is worn when trusting, 'faith' is matched with what we do 'works/deeds'. These truths which God has joined together we ought not try to pull apart!

Then, as now, there were those who said "I live only for the next world, I'm not too concerned about what happens in this one. My main concern is to further my knowledge of the faith and bolster future hope—that's really what counts."

On the other hand, there were and are those who say "I'm a practical Christian. I don't spend a lot of time thinking about the things of God—the finer points of faith. I just get on with doing my bit to help other people." Which of these approaches is right? The answer, according to James, is neither. We should strive for a growing knowledge about the Lord, we should also strive to serve people. Neither view is right to think that it's gotta be an either/or choice between *faith* and *good deeds*, that is you either immerse yourself in thinking about faith or you immerse yourself in doing things to help others. It's not an either/or but should be a both/and approach!

James needs to teach about this so they and we get it straight.

(1) The Lifelessness of a 'dead' faith v14-19.

There is such a thing as 'dead' faith which will not save a person because it does not include Jesus. In this teaching he singles out behaviour between believers.

v14:

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?"

He expects the answer no!
He then gives the example which supports his case (v15-16):

*"Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.
If one of you says to him, 'Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,' but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"*

That brother, that sister, doesn't need you to teach them the finer points of the catechism, they need your practical help! Here, James is drawing on the experience of the young Church as mentioned in the Book of Acts where fellow-believers saw needs and generously met them even to the point of selling land if that were necessary to meet them.

To have a genuine need, make it known and be fobbed off with fine-sounding words would be like being served artificial cream with one's dessert—very disappointing. Perhaps the well-wisher would really mean what they said, but such charitable words would be inadequate, wouldn't they?

We can't hope to meet every single need but should we be able to do something and choose to do nothing that would be dreadful!

This does happen!

As James adds, v 17:

"In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."

That is, the claim to have demonstrated or shown genuine faith ought to be accompanied by action! Otherwise it is a hollow statement, without real meaning.

Artificial cream lacks the nutrients as well as the taste of real cream and whilst it may be better than no cream at all, it is a disappointing let-down to those looking for the real thing.

Fellow-believers deserve a better witness from a Christian and so does the world!

Verse eighteen shows how genuine faith should be expressed, by means of deeds.

Then we come to this astonishing verse nineteen:

"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder."

See that? Those who tell me, tell you, that they believe in God, they're not necessarily better off than the demons who shuddered before Jesus when He was on earth! God have mercy on us for our carelessness for peoples' souls when we don't check with them if they've come to actually trust in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord when we hear them say such vague and general things as "don't worry about my soul, I believe in God you know."

A general belief in God is no guarantee of Salvation at all.

(2) The Liveliness Of Living Faith v 21-25

[A] Abraham v21-24. See how the history is cited v21-22:

"Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?" [see Hebrews 11 v17-19 for more details]

You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did."

Now the fact that the Holy Spirit led James to use this example from Abraham's life, shows we're talking about the life of faith, lived by a believer—Abraham was *declared righteous* by God some fifteen years before this incident took place.

Verse twenty-three reminds us of Abraham's repeated exercising of trust which shows a living relationship with God, which God terms friendship:

"And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend."

A full, mature life is demonstrated when faith is active verse twenty-four:

"You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone."

So Abraham is the first example of a believer exercising active faith and Rahab is the second.

[B] Rahab v25:

"In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?"

The moment at which rahab came to trust in God for salvation isn't recorded in God's word—but she did, because joshua two records her testimony to her peoples' awe of God and her willingness to trust in Him and co-operate with His representatives rather than try to resist His Plan.

Now some of us have a lite-cream Christian faith-experience, others have a double-clotted-cream experience and both those are precious! Having an active faith a "faith that is at work by means of love" as Paul puts it that is the take-home message today.

How wonderful to be able to trust our risen Lord Jesus for our complete Salvation. Equally, how glorious to desire to want to respond to that Salvation with lives of obedient faith.

It's those who have an artificial-cream experience about whom this section would cause me to be concerned! Like having an beautifully-tailored jacket without the bottom of the outfit they'd have cause to be embarrassed and rightly so; near enough isn't good enough with God! To have a true faith we must first truly come to Him for salvation, rely on Him like Abraham and Rahab did, trust in Jesus' power and readiness to forgive us and then respond to that truth with a changed life. Rejoice when you experience the desire to serve the Lord and as you do serve Him, knowing that as Abraham and Rahab's acts of faith were seen as precious in the Father's sight so will yours be.

"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead." [verse 26]