

Taking Strides

Disciples

Faith Alive

As you do a study of God's Word and think about how to apply it, please don't think about these words in abstraction. God didn't record these words and hand them on to us so that we could just discuss them and memorize them. He said these things to move us to action. So here are three true accounts of children—orphans—to help us remember what this is really about. This is life from Jesus that must be lived out.

Jacob's parents both died from AIDS. He was being cared for by his grandmother until she found out that Jacob was HIV+. Because of the stigma attached to AIDS, Jacob's grandmother abandoned him. Jacob now had absolutely no one to look after him. He was totally alone—an orphan in one of the poorest countries in the

world. Every 14 seconds, a child loses a parent to AIDS. A child just like Jacob.

Marta is an orphan. When her parents died, she was taken in by her uncle— who didn't want to care for her. The situation spiraled downward until Marta ran away. She lived in a nearby woods with other runaway children, barely surviving. While living in the woods, Marta was the victim of abuse by the other children— until she was discovered and rescued. Marta is the type of girl who is vulnerable to being forced into prostitution. In the capital city of Marta's country, there are 40,000 workers in the brothels — many of them children. Children just like Marta.

Pierre is a slave. He works from before dawn until past dark, working to please the family that owns him. If he does not immediately obey, he is beaten. He does not go to school. He has no bed to sleep in. He eats alone, away from the family's table. He wishes he could go back to his real family —but he doesn't know whether they are still alive. Studies show that 300,000 children live under the bondage of slavery in this poor country. Children just like Pierre.

For Discussion

There is so much hurt, poverty, abuse and abandonment in this world - what good does our effort do? For every one you or I might help, there are thousands still untouched—why bother?

Encounter

Read God's word so He can speak to you.

James 1:26-27; 2:14-26

1:26 If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. 27 Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 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? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder. 20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our ancestor 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 God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. 25 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? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

Examine

what the passage says before you decide what it means.

Read it carefully **three** times.

Underline anything you see as important. Write any questions you have.

Explore

God's Word by asking questions of what you saw.
The notes that follow may help you think through these questions.

1)

What is a “worthless religion” or a “useless faith”?

2)

Why is God so concerned about those in need? After all, isn't this a fallen world under the curse of sin, so aren't these needs just what we deserve?

3)

Why is there such a strong connection between saving faith and changed lives? What does this mean about our salvation?

4)

What does God really expect us to do?

- What are you doing?

Notes On The Passage

(Adapted from Thomas Constable, *Expository Notes*)

1:26 – This is part of what it means to be a doer of the word (1:25). "Religious" (Gr. *threskos*, used only here in the New Testament) describes someone who fears or worships God. In fact, it describes more the entire organized community, rather than the individual—in other words, the church and beliefs each of us represents. In particular, it refers to the outward consequences of what one believes (i.e., piety, good works) rather than to what he believes or the fact that he believes deeply. The Jews, who were James' original readers, typically regarded almsgiving, prayer, fasting, regular attendance at worship services, and the observance of holy days and feasts as signs of true spirituality (cf. Matt. 6:1-18). However, James said a better test of spirituality was God's control of one's tongue (cf. 3:1-12).

27 - Taking care of orphans and widows (conduct) is a duty that lies close to the heart of God (cf. Exod. 22:22-24; Deut. 10:18; Isa. 1:17; Jer. 5:28; Ezek. 22:7; Zech. 7:10). Yet many who professed to love Him neglected it (Ps. 68:5; Eccles. 4:1; Mark 12:40). Likewise personal moral purity (character) is an excellent external indicator of godliness (cf. Acts 15:20; 1 Tim. 5:22). James argued for reality. He did not want us to deceive ourselves into thinking that we are spiritual if our obedience to God is only superficial.

2:14-17 – Faith is completed with works. James and Paul are not in disagreement. They agree that justification is by faith alone (Acts 15:14-29; Gal. 2:9, 10). But they supplement each other. Faith + works does NOT provide justification (Rom. 3:20-22; 4:1-10); but faith without works is without profit (James 2:14-17). Therefore genuine faith must result in works for profit to occur (Gal. 5:6; Eph. 2:8-10; Titus 1:16; 2:14; 3:8; James 1:26-27; 2:1, 24). "Faith alone justifies, but faith that justifies is never alone."

"Works" are the acts of mercy, control of tongue, obedience (1:26, 27; 2:15-17; context of book). This follows from the argument of verse 12, "so speak and act." "Save" means deliverance (1:21; 2:14; 4:12; 5:15, 20).

James' use of this word is not so much about salvation, but about experience and practical deliverance. He is not giving a definition of saving faith. But he is raising the issue of whether the faith by which one receives salvation is genuine if it is not followed by its application in meeting the needs of others.

Note two-fold issue of "saved" – a benefit to the one claiming this faith (deliverance from judgment, v. 13), and a benefit to the one experiencing a need (v. 16 - "what use"). He is saying that without doing people are without profit (v. 20) to either the one in need, or to the one claiming faith.

18-20 - Two main points are made: (1) faith without works is incapable of demonstration (18), and (2) faith without works is consistent with the faith of demons (19). Or another way of saying this: Faith and works are not independent of each other.

Who is the speaker in verse 18? The NIV translates it as the opponent in 18a, and James in 18b-19. The NASB translates it as the opponent in 18, and James in 19. "But someone may say" indicates an opponent (e.g., 1 Cor 15:35; Rom 9:19; 11:19; Lk 4:23); however, the content of what "someone" says is the same as James' argument. So what is going on here?

Suggestions:

- (1) Verse 18 is a proponent of James' view; "indeed," "verily" (cf. 2 Cor. 7:11; Phil 1:18). But this person is "foolish" (v. 20), and not one speaking truth.
- (2) An objector is speaking in verses 18-19, saying faith is not important, only works are important; or that there is no relationship between faith and works.
- (3) The objector speaks in 18a (there is no relationship between faith and works), and James responds in 18b. Yet this seems to continue the same thought without a necessary change in speaker.

Conclusion: It is probably best to follow suggestion

Notes On The Passage (con't)

(3). The objector says faith and works are mutually exclusive. Between the “you” and “I” (whoever they may be), both claim to have faith, but only one can demonstrate it. “Faith” which is not demonstrated is no different than the “faith” of demons. It is possible to have a creedal faith without works (v. 19); that faith doesn't mean a thing (cf. Deut. 6:4).

21-25 – Illustrations of the need for works to demonstrate true faith

21 – James is not contradicting Paul (Rom. 4:1-3). Paul refers to Genesis 15:5, a justification before God that came first. James refers to Genesis 22 - a justification before men that comes after and proves the truth of being justified before God.

22 - Faith working with works (cf. Heb. 11:17) - faith was the basis/source for the works (Heb 11:17). “Perfected” means “comes to maturity” in works. This corresponds to and defines the endurance in trials of 1:3-4 with the same result of maturity. The Genesis 15 saving faith bears fruit in the faithful act of Genesis 22.

23 - “fulfilled” - confirmed the earlier declaration of Genesis 15. The faith of Gen 15 *necessarily* implied and included the results of Gen 22. If it was real, others would be able to see it in action.

24 - “justified,” like “consider worthy,” is a declarative not a causative verb. In other words, justification is not earned but imputed. This is the answer to verse 14 - faith without subsequent works cannot save because it is not a genuine faith. Abraham was justified by a faith that *resulted* in works.

25-26 - This is true for *all* individuals - female, not just male; prostitute, not just “friend of God;” the condemned race, not just the chosen race. So the conclusion is clear: faith without works is like a corpse—profitless. The Christian life is not merely creedal (what we profess); it is obvious (what we do).

Going Further

One thing we can do to train ourselves to remember, is to memorize a part of what our Father has said to us.

The Holy Spirit can use this to change our thinking so that our “heads” are more like Jesus.

This week, memorize James 1:27.