

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JAMES

James 2:14-26

Intro: I come tonight to the conclusion of a brief series on the Gospel--from four NT writers: the Gospel according to Paul, the Gospel according to Peter, the Gospel according to John, and now--the Gospel according to James.

It is quite interesting to see how disturbed some have gotten over the emphasis which James makes. After considering Paul and Peter and John we can be startled a little bit by what we read here in James 2.

Some feel, like Martin Luther, that James contradicted the teaching of the Apostle Paul. He called it "an epistle of straw." Others think that James wrote part of this epistle, but not all of it. One writer suggests that James wrote 2:1-13, but that he could not have written 2:14-26 (Oesterley in the Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol. IV, 408).

There is no doubt but that salvation in the Bible is by faith, and faith alone--our works having no part in obtaining salvation. Paul makes this clear. Peter speaks of "the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1 Pet. 1:3). John emphasizes the love of God for man in salvation--not man's love for God.

So none of the men which we have considered thus far will give man any credit for salvation. IT IS ALL OF GOD!

Is James saying something different? Or, is it possible that James is emphasizing a truth which Paul, and Peter, and John also emphasize, but not to the same degree?

In answering these questions, let us note the following:

I. THE DESTINATION OF THIS EPISTLE. Cf. 1:1.

James is writing to Jews--Jews of all twelve tribes who have been scattered and persecuted for their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

By background, these Jews were people who had been raised under a twofold emphasis:

- (1) They had been taught that they had a special place in the heart of God, and in the purposes of God, because they were Jews. This, supposedly, gave them an advantage over the Gentiles which the Gentiles could never re-gain.

- (2) They had been raised on the Law and on the traditions of the elders. Their religion had been a religion of works.

Remember how the Lord had raised the ire of the Jews because of ways in which He failed to observe Jewish traditions. He never broke the Law, but He had no respect for the traditions which had been added to the Law!

As is often the case, the pendulum can often swing in just exactly the opposite direction after we do come to the Lord, and it would appear that this had happened to the Jews who are receiving this epistle. THEY HAD GONE FROM AN EXTREME ON WORKS TO AN EXTREME ON FAITH—neither of which was the true teaching of the Word of God!

In addition . . .

Because they were going through a time of persecution, they would quite naturally be inclined to keep from showing any more than they had to that they were the children of God.

So that by background and by their present circumstances we can see why FAITH would have been their chief emphasis.

Martin Luther could easily have fallen into the same problem, and maybe he did! But he lived at a time when works were everything in the Catholic Church, and therefore he could not tolerate anything that seemed to be a contradiction of his text: "The just shall live by faith" (Rom. 1:17).

But let us notice secondly that

II. JAMES DOES NOT DENY THE NECESSITY OF FAITH.

He starts out by showing the relationship that their testings have to their faith. Cf. 1:2-4, esp. v. 3.

Then, in our text, he never speaks of works without faith, but of faith without works.

Note some of the statements:

- (1) In v. 17 he does not say that works is sufficient without faith, but that faith without works is not enough.
- (2) In v. 18: "I will show thee my faith by my works."
- (3) In v. 22: "Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect."
- (4) He even quotes from the foundational text of the OT

which proves without any question that salvation is by faith: Gen. 15:6.

Therefore, any person who says that James is denying the necessity of faith for salvation just has not read this passage carefully enough!

III. JAMES IS STRIVING TO CORRECT FALSE TEACHING REGARDING FAITH WHICH APPEARED IN THE FIRST CENTURY--ESPECIALLY AMONG THE JEWS.

It is easy to see what that false teaching was. Cf. v. 19. THERE WERE SOME WHO WERE CONTENT TO THINK THAT FAITH SIMPLY MEANT DOCTRINAL AGREEMENT WITH THE TEACHINGS OF SCRIPTURE. It is wonderful that they believed in "one God," but demons also believe in "one God," and yet no demon has ever been or ever will be saved!

How many there are today, it can be feared, who have been content with an intellectual acceptance of the Word of God—they believe in God,

they believe in the Bible,

they believe in the deity of Jesus Christ,

they believe that He died and rose again,

they believe that salvation is by faith,

they even go to church all of the time,

BUT YOU CAN LOOK AND LOOK AND LOOK IN THE LIVES TO SEE ANY EVIDENCE THAT THEY HAVE REALLY COME TO A PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR.

What do I mean by this?

I mean that IF you and I have really received Christ as our Savior, IT WILL BE EVIDENT IN OUR LIVES. THE EVIDENCE WILL BE THERE. THIS IS WHAT JAMES IS TALKING ABOUT WHEN HE WRITES ABOUT "WORKS."

Note his two illustrations from the OT (and remember that he is writing to his Jewish brethren):

- (1) Abraham. He quotes from Gen. 15, but his main emphasis is on Gen. 22. (Review the story.) Some have tried to harmonize Paul and James by saying that Paul is talking about our justification before God, but James is talking about our justification before man. If that had been the case, then he never would have used Abraham as an illustration. Read Gen. 22:12, "And he (the angel of the Lord) said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him; for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me."

ABRAHAM DEMONSTRATED THE REALITY OF HIS FAITH BY HIS WILLINGNESS TO DO WHAT GOD ASKED HIM TO DO. HIS WORKS WERE NOT AN ADDITION TO HIS FAITH; HIS WORKS WERE THE PROOF OF HIS FAITH.

- (2) Rahab. Read her story in Joshua 2, and especially her words in vv. 8-13.

How do we know that she had trusted the Lord? (Remember that we are talking now about a Canaanite, and one who was just as different from Abraham as she could be.) She proved the reality of her faith by her works because "she received the messengers, and . . . sent them out another way."

Nothing but a genuine faith could have made her do what she did!

James is not saying that Abraham was justified because he offered up Isaac. Neither is he saying that Rahab was justified because she received the spies. BUT HE IS SAYING THAT THE REALITY OF THEIR FAITH IS SEEN IN THEIR WORKS.

Finally, tonight, I want us to see that

IV. JAMES IS IN PERFECT AGREEMENT WITH PAUL, AND PETER, AND JOHN WHEN HE WRITES ALONG THIS LINE.

- A. Paul. Cf. Eph. 2:8-10. We never really should read vv. 8, 9 without v. 10.
- B. Peter. Cf. 1 Pet. 2:11, 12. "Dearly beloved, I beseech you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, Having your behavior honest among the Gentiles, that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."
- C. John. We have a passage in 1 John which could almost have been taken from James. Read James 2:14-17, and then read 1 John 3:17-19. AND WILL YOU NOTE THAT THE BELIEVER HIMSELF IS THE ONE WHO IS ASSURED BY THE VERY DESIRE IN HIS HEART TO HELP A BROTHER IN NEED.

Concl: Paul and Peter and John and James are one in their emphasis that salvation is by faith. But they are also one in their emphasis that salvation by faith will manifest itself in a life, in "works," that are an expression of that faith.

How important that each one of us see this truth, and have the assurance of our own salvation which comes from "works" which could not be in our lives if our faith in Christ were not genuine!