

Hearers and doers

James 2:14 What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?

17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Not just hearers but doers, faith without works.

James feels the need to write this in this letter because there was controversy in the early church. You think controversy is a more modern thing, not so.

Part of the controversy that made them have a conference in Jerusalem was that: Paul and Barnabas were preaching to the Gentiles telling them if they accepted Jesus' crucifixion, His resurrection and have the faith of Christ they would be saved. But the church in Jerusalem, disagreed. The church in Jerusalem said a man couldn't be saved until he was circumcised and followed the law of Moses.

On the one hand, you have Paul and Barnabas, saying repent be baptized Trust Jesus as your Savior.

The other side had the church in Jerusalem, who said to be saved, you have to trust Jesus but you had to be circumcised. There was a great confrontation in the church and guess who presided over the conference? James! James was over the conference, he made the final decree, and wrote the decree for the church. And what did he say? He said you had to be hearers and doers. He said in chapter 2 verse 26, faith without works is dead.

Martin Luther thought the Book of James should not be in the Bible: it was a book of straw. He thought it contradicted Paul. Paul said – you have been saved by grace through faith, not by works, so that nobody can boast.

I'm not nearly as smart as Martin Luther was, but I can't believe Luther didn't get this – James is not saying your works save you. He is not saying the DOING saves you. You don't have to do to be saved. He's saying if you are saved, and, if you have the Holy Spirit inside of you, that it makes you want to do the works, it makes you want to be a doer, not just a hearer. James says there's a problem when all you want to do is hear about Jesus and not do what He says. It's the other side of the same coin as what Paul says. You are saved by grace through faith – and you will know it by what you do.

It would be like me telling my son to clean his room. He goes to his room and in an hour I go to his room and he's sitting on a messy bed, clothes still strewn on the floor, the room has been untouched. I say to

him, I thought I told you to clean your room? He says, you know dad I've been thinking about what you said. I definitely heard what you said. I've been contemplating it. I tell him, you don't need to study it or think about it anymore. You heard what I said, now you just need to do it.

At the beginning of chapter 2, James says, there's a problem when you pay attention to the people who are dressed nicely, and ignore the poor man in shabby clothes. When you pay attention to the outcast, the poor, you are being doers of the word.

Does that make any of you think of anything? It does me

Mt 25: Jesus explains a doer.

35 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:

36 Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.

Jesus loved and loves the poor, the outcast, the lost, the discouraged, the unsought, the weeping, and also the rich. He loved them all, and he loves us all. But I find it hard to love the people He loves and love people the way he loves. Can you be honest enough with yourself to admit that, too? I find it difficult to love like Jesus. Even when we come in the church, we're often hearers and not doers.

Do you see what he did there? He says we come into a place in which we should be trembling and pounding our chest like the repentant sinner about being unworthy to be here, and maybe at one time we were, but somewhere along the way we get comfortable in church. A little too comfortable. We get comfortable to the point that we appoint ourselves as the ones who decide who's in and who's out. We start to believe it's our job to decide who should be coming into the church, We start to believe it's our job to decide what they should be wearing, We start to believe it's our job to decide how they should be behaving, James says that's not being doers of the word. It's a worthless faith.

Finally, I want to bring in the Gospel reading from Mark – The religious people are telling Jesus – listen, your disciples are dirty – they didn't wash their hands before they ate. The religious people washed their hands a certain way, washed the pitchers and cups in just the right way –

And Jesus said Isaiah prophesied that there would be hypocrites such as them – “The people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me, and in vain they worship me.”

James says you are hearing in vain if you are not doing. Your faith is only a valid faith if it moves you to do. To do for others in the church, to do for others in the world, to do for those in Zuspan's trailer park. Our job is not to keep the riffraff out. Our job is to show everyone the love of Jesus. The people who think they're something – and there are some in every crowd – they're deceiving themselves.