



James 2:18-26

I can remember when I was learning to drive. My relationship with my Dad suffered greatly as he tried to teach me to drive! It was a nightmare. He'd tell me to do certain things and it didn't make sense to me because he never did them when he drove and I pointed this out to him. You know what the answer was: "don't do as I do, do as I tell you!" I know a GP who used to be obese, smoked like a chimney and drank like a fish. I wonder how many people were convinced at the advice he gave on losing weight, giving up smoking or moderating on drink. *Actions speak louder than words* the old proverb says - and it's true isn't it? People who say one thing and do another just don't have any credibility do they? "Actions speak louder than words" means that if you want people to believe your words, you should "speak" with your actions. Example: "Don't tell me how to do this; show me! I'd go as far as to say that each man and woman in the world suffers from this – a mouth full of good intentions but actions? That's another thing! And in church – we can be as bad as anyone else.

You may wonder what I have a picture of ducks up for. Let me illustrate my point from a nineteenth century Danish philosopher and theologian, Soren Kirkegaard who told of a totally mythical church only attended by ducks: *"One Sunday morning all the ducks came into the church, waddled down the aisle and into their pews, and squatted. Then the duck minister took his place behind the pulpit, opened the duck Bible and read, 'Ducks! You have wings, and with wings you can fly like eagles. You can soar into the sky! Use your wings!' All the ducks yelled 'Amen!' and they all waddled home."*

Ridiculous! Yes it is, but it's there to illustrate the same thing that still goes on in the lives of Christians to this very day, when faced with the truths and challenges of God to be like Jesus. They say "wonderful", "amen", "what a challenge from God" and then they waddle home.

Over the past few weeks we have explored themes on how God expects us to act as His Church. We've looked at baptism, we've looked at the debacle the Corinthians called the Lord's supper. We've explored our attitudes and our motives, but this morning I want to finish with our actions. Does what we say we are tally with how we behave? And does what we believe affect our lives at all?

RT Kendall says this:

Some Christians never move on beyond what seems to them to be the normal Christian life: flirting with the world and temptation, blaming their temptation on God, on providence, on their own temperament, and imagining this is the way to live.

Yet we have a faith that we say is life changing and world changing. Then James would say, show me by who you are and how you act that it is.

I must say Christians find the words of James strange even difficult. Martin Luther found James so difficult that he even questioned whether it should be considered scripture – he called it an epistle of straw. Why? Well haven't we always been told that we are saved by grace through faith. You know I like repeating this one. Luther based his whole criticism of the church at that time on the fact that the Bible teaches justification by faith alone (people are made right through faith Jesus alone), yet James seems to be teaching that it is by faith and works? *17 So it is with faith: if it is alone and includes no actions, then it is dead.* A lot of Christians since Luther have suggested that he could have read it a bit more thoroughly because he isn't saying that at all.

So what is James saying? It's challenging because it makes us consider what the basis of our faith is and how it should change our life. Let me be a good Baptist(!) and consider it under the compulsory three points.

◆ Real faith is about action

Look carefully, that isn't what James is actually saying. What James ISN'T saying is that if you are

trusting Jesus, you need to do certain things to make and keep God happy – or else! That's the way of most religions in this world.

What he's saying is that if you say you are a Christian you'll automatically start to be different because you understand the nature of your faith and start to want to do things that are pleasing to God. If we have genuine faith, then we'll seek out a right way of living because Jesus deserves nothing else. I've been married almost 27 years. One of the interesting things that happens when you love someone is that you seek to please them - not to keep them off your back - but because it gives you pleasure to do it.

James illustrates his point like this: For instance, you come upon an old friend dressed in rags and half-starved and say, "Good morning, friend! Be clothed in Christ! Be filled with the Holy Spirit!" and walk off without providing so much as a coat or a cup of soup—where does that get you? Isn't it obvious that God-talk without God-acts is outrageous nonsense? (The Message). It's obvious isn't it. If any of us came across anyone in this kind of desperate need, we'd do what we could to help not just give some patronising spiritual babble to them about remembering in prayer.

A lady answered the knock on her door to find a man with a sad expression. "I'm sorry to disturb you," he said, "but I'm collecting money for an unfortunate family in the neighbourhood. The husband is out of work, the kids are hungry, the utilities will soon be cut off, and worse, they're going to be kicked out of their apartment if they don't pay the rent by this afternoon."

"I'll be happy to help," said the woman with great concern. "But who are you?" "I'm the landlord," he replied.

If you say you're a Christian your life should show it – and it will show in the everyday situations of friendship, compassion, encouragement, kindness, wise words and good speech. Because if it doesn't people will ask themselves – is this person's faith real or just a hypocritical sham? If our faith is genuine, then our actions should match. If our faith is real, then the Holy Spirit gives us that power to live as Jesus wants us to.

John Piper: *James' concern is that people have real saving faith, not counterfeit faith. And the difference is that the real faith produces loving behaviour.*

I have said consistently since coming here that we are all witnesses – whether we like it or not. Our lives speak our faith for us.

◆ Real Faith brings life

I know that some of you are familiar with this illustration. Suppose you are on Ipswich station wanting the London train. One comes in but you are not certain that this is the train. You can't understand the board so you ask a member of staff. They say "yes" get on. But you dither. What if he got it wrong. So you go and ask the driver who's hanging out of his window. "Yes" this is the London train. But you still dither "what if he's wrong?" Then the doors close and the train leaves and you are left on the platform looking an idiot. A daft illustration but it illustrates that if you want to go to London, you act. Your faith is demonstrated by your actions and your faith in National Express Anglia is demonstrated not by your words but by the fact you pay for your ticket and get on the train. That's what James is about.

You see, some people say "But as long as I believe in God, that's fine" some say. People believe lots of things about Jesus. Well says James 19 Do you believe that there is only one God? Good! The demons also believe — and tremble with fear.

It's one thing to believe something is true. But the difference comes when we base our life on it, because trusting Jesus demands we do that. We realise and we understand that Jesus says, trust me, follow me, love like me, obey my words – it's a faith about actions – trust, follow, love, obey.

◆ Real faith is proved through actions

So what James is saying is that if your faith is genuine, your life and your actions will show it. You'll trust, follow, love, obey. You'll love Jesus so much that your life will show the difference. James give us some examples from Israel's history, of Abraham and of Rahab. Both had a faith that made the difference. But for both, the consequences of their faith was that they had to risk their lives and

the lives of others on the decision that they made.

Abraham – believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. We read this at several places in the NT. They are the words of Genesis. Abraham found acceptance by God because he was prepared to trust Him. But says James, *his faith was made perfect in his actions*. It was one thing to believe in God, but Abraham proved that his faith was genuine by trusting God on a variety of occasions but James gives us the most dramatic one as an example when God commanded him to kill his son Isaac – the child of promise. Of course, God didn't allow him to go through it but for Abraham it showed the nature of his faith – that he was prepared to trust and obey God whatever the perceived consequences. Yes he had faith and it saved him, but that faith took him through life-changing experiences that had world-changing consequences.

The story of Rahab is the same. She showed her faith in God by her actions in helping the Israelite spies – and she and the people in her house were saved when Jericho fell. Rescued through faith which made her take risks, trusting God in her actions.

Let me ask you a serious question this morning? Do you have a genuine faith in Christ? Is it a faith that assures you that when you die you know you are going to heaven? Is it a faith that you know you are right with God? Is it a faith that has responded to the call of Jesus when He says “follow Me” . If you've trusted Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, then that's your faith.

But how do the rest of us, or the rest of us know that it's true? By the way we live, not just by our actions. Let me ask you a question? When people see you, do they say Christian! Or Christian? It worries me when I see Christians whose words and actions just don't match who they say they are. I ask myself the question – is their faith genuine? Sometimes it is and they've lost their way. Sometimes it isn't and they just need to come to a faith in Jesus which will change their lives.

Is your faith genuine and you know your actions don't match? Prayer of repentance.

You've realise you don't have a genuine faith? - Trust Jesus for the first time.

All the ducks yelled 'Amen!' and they all waddled home. As Christians, we have the potential to fly. So let us resolve to stop waddling about.

So then, as the body without the spirit is dead, so also *faith without actions is dead.*