

**Anglican Church Noosa**  
**September 22, 2024**  
**James 2**  
**Faith that Works - Favourites and Faith**  
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This is week 2 in our series on James and today our topic is Favourites and Faith.

This little letter of James is a bit like the Proverbs of the New Testament.

It regularly points to wisdom as something which is to be sought after, and something we don't naturally have, hence in chapter 1 James says, 'if you lack wisdom, ask God for it.'  
But James also points to humility as a vital element of godly living.

These are definitely things related to today's title as we look at what James says about favouritism, and what he says about faith and works, or faith and obedience.

The first two chapters of James has Faith and Obedience as the overarching theme.

Last week we heard that James says, don't just hear the word - DO IT!!  
A very direct reprimand.

And we have a word for people who **don't** do it, don't we?

When people hear one thing, or say one thing, but do something completely different, or don't do anything at all.

We have a word for it. That word is hypocrite.

We find it reasonably easy to call people hypocrites if we see something like that happening.

And very often, WE, Christians, get labelled as hypocrites. If the callout is legitimate, then that is appalling!  
And let's face it, sometimes we deserve it.

In this chapter today, I think that's what James is reeling against.

It is very clear that this church in Jerusalem **IS showing** favouritism, because he says, 'do you really believe in the Lord Jesus while you're clearly showing favouritism?'

Showing favouritism or partiality is a constant temptation isn't it?

I think back to when I was raising my kids.

At various times, depending on how each of them were behaving, it was a really hard thing to not have a favourite every now and then. And I can tell you that it circled around the three of them.

Whether you're a parent, a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, whether it's your political position, your financial position, it's kind of easy to show favourites.

Now please don't hear me saying that we shouldn't show discernment. We most definitely should, but this is specifically speaking about the general propensity to show partiality.

James' particular callout here is about the differing treatment of the rich and poor.

Making wealth a criteria for priority shows complete disregard for a person made in the image of God.

James even goes on to say that it has been the rich people who have been treating others so badly, so to, basically, suck up to them in this way, shows that their treatment is coming from bad intent.

Especially when they know the teaching of the Lord Jesus, that God has chosen the poor to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom.

Do you remember the sermon on the mount? Jesus said - Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

James does not mean that only poor people will be saved. But it's true that wealth can often be an obstacle to faith in Christ, as Jesus himself pointed out.

What is happening here is that James' readers are maltreating the poor while giving priority to the rich who exploit them.

And our other reading this morning pointed out that hypocrisy is not to be seen in God's people. Don't find the speck in someone else's eye when you've got a log in your own. James' teaching here is mirroring the teaching of Jesus.

And then he launches into this example of two differing people entering worship and being treated very differently.

A poor man and a rich man enter, and one is treated with favour, and the other with contempt.

James is saying that this is in direct contradiction to the central command of God's law, which at its heart has love for neighbour.

How did Jesus summarise the 10 commandments?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength, and love your neighbour as yourself.

In fact James calls this the 'royal law' in v.8 - it's importance is so great.

James is saying that if this is their behaviour, then they may well be deceived about their relationship with God. In fact he says that if they break that law, they have broken the whole law, because the whole law is one consistent unit.

Don't discriminate. Don't show favouritism.

The life application study bible notes say this much better than I could. So let me share with you.

It points out that there are 8 reasons why it is wrong to show favouritism.

1. It is inconsistent with Christ's teaching
2. it results from evil thoughts
3. it belittles people made in God's image
4. it is a by-product of selfish motives
5. it goes against the biblical definition of love
6. it shows a lack of mercy to those less fortunate

7. it is hypocritical
8. it is sin.

So there you have it.

My recommendation ..... Be consistent and don't show favouritism to some over others.  
Love God. Love others.

James then goes on to this huge issue of Faith and Works.

He's is making a huge point here - that you can't have faith without good works.  
His conclusion is that - faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

He asks the question 'what good is faith, without works?'  
His answer - It's useless.

He compares faith without works to a person who wishes that the hungry and naked might be fed and clothed, but doesn't give them anything to help them to be fed and clothed.

And then he asks the bigger question - can a faith that doesn't lead to works save a person?  
And his conclusion is - if a person doesn't do anything to show their faith, then it is of no consequence or impact.

You see there is really no way to show your faith to anyone is there? How can we SEE faith?

There is only evidence of faith, when it results in changed behaviour.

As I was preparing this week I found a great quote from a guy called Patrick Morley who wrote a book called I Surrender. This is what he says ...  
he writes that the church has an integrity problem "it is a misconception that we can add Christ to our lives, but not subtract sin. It is a change in belief without a change in behaviour."

I thought that was a brilliant way of helping us understand.

So James' first response is a practical one.  
Only by deeds can faith truly be shown.

He leaves us in no doubt, by telling us three separate times that -  
v.17 faith by itself, if it's not accompanied by action, is dead  
v.20 faith without deeds is useless  
v.26 faith without deeds is dead.

What he means by that is that without deeds, faith is not able to achieve its purpose. It cannot save us. It cannot justify us.

Now this is where some people have a bit of contention with James, thinking that he's disagreeing with Paul by saying that works need to be added to faith.

But what he's actually saying is that genuine biblical faith will always be characterised by action.

The Bible explains consistently that we are justified by faith. This is the case in Genesis, it is the case in Romans.

James cites the faith of Abraham when he was prepared to act on his faith and offer Isaac on the altar. James is saying that Abraham exhibited his faith and showed it to be a living and active faith by being obedient.

But those people who have faith without deeds, are no better than the demons who most definitely believe in God.

In Romans 3:28, Paul says that justification is by faith apart from works. Paul is speaking of **how** a person can be saved.

James is speaking of people who claim to have faith, but lack the evidence of works. James is concerned with evidence of genuine salvation, and that influences what he means by justification.

So Paul and James don't actually contradict each other. They are talking about very different things.

I want to share a quote from the German reformer Martin Luther - it's pretty heavy, so it will be on the screen ...

*"The question is asked: how can justification take place without the works of the law, even though James says: "Faith without works is dead"?*

*In answer, the apostle Paul distinguishes between the law and faith, the letter and grace.*

*The '**works of the law**' are works done without faith and grace, by the law, which forces them to be done through fear or the enticing promise of temporal advantages.*

*But '**works of faith**' are those done in the spirit of liberty, purely out of love to God. And they can be done only by those who are justified by faith.*

*Paul does not say that faith is without its characteristic works, but that it justifies without the works of the law. Therefore justification does not require the works of the law; but it does require a living faith, which performs its works."*

My friends, may we be a faithful people, with a truly living and saving faith, shown by prayer, action and good deeds. Amen.