



11.21.10/James 2:20-24 & 26

Materials Needed

none

Opening Discussion

Imagine you moved to a new town where you didn't know anyone. Let's pretend that you were very nervous about making friends in your new school. You found out that your next door neighbor went to the same school you were going to go to, and was actually even in your class! You asked him if he would be your friend and he said yes! You would probably feel relieved that you had at least one friend in your new school, right? But what if, when you went into your new classroom, your "friend" didn't say hello to you? He didn't sit beside you at lunch, didn't play with you during recess, and didn't even talk to you at all! How would you feel about your "friend?" *You probably would say that he wasn't a good friend, because he wasn't acting like a friend at all! Even though he said he was your friend, he wasn't doing the things that friends do – talking to each other, spending time with each other, helping one another, etc.* Tell the children that tonight we will talk about how we can be friends with God!

Read James 2:21-24 & 26

"Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness' – and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. . . . For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead."

****Before moving on, make sure everyone is familiar with the story of Abraham and Isaac. It can be found in Genesis 22.****

Question 1

Why was Abraham called a friend of God? *He proved that he loved God and would do His will no matter what when he prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac. He trusted God, and believed that God knew what was best. He even believed that God would save Isaac and that they would worship the Lord together after the sacrifice. His actions showed his faith, and were credited to him as righteousness.*

Discussion

But wait! What about Scripture passages like Ephesians 2:8-9 that say that we are saved from faith – NOT from our works. Isn't James saying the opposite here? Which is more important – faith or works? *At first glance, it seems like James and Paul are contradicting each other, but if we take a closer look, we realize how closely faith and actions are related, and that true faith cannot exist without action. Remember our example at the beginning with the neighbor that said he was a friend but didn't act like it? That's how it is with our relationship with God – if we say we have faith in him, but then don't have any actions to back it up, then it's obvious that we never really had any faith to begin with. A true faith will show itself through actions of love, compassion, and mercy, as God makes us more and more like Himself.*

Question 2

Think about how the neighbor could have used his actions to show that he was a true friend (introducing you to other classmates, sitting with you at lunch, playing at recess, etc.). Now think about your relationship with God. What are some things that you can do this week to get to know and understand God better? How would you go about becoming "better friends" with God? *Answers will vary, but may include – spending time talking to Him in prayer, reading about Him in the Bible, telling others about the good things He has given you in your life, asking for forgiveness for the times that you aren't a good friend to Him.*



Question 3

Consider this quote from Charles Spurgeon, a man who told lots and lots of people about God. “We believe that men are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith which is alone. They are saved without works, but not by a faith that is without works.” How does this quote illustrate the relationship between faith and works that James was talking about? *Genuine faith cannot exist without works. Doing good deeds cannot bring about faith – but rather with a true faith in God demonstrates obedience and service to God.*

Question 4

Now that we know that genuine faith in Jesus is accompanied by works, how does this faith come to us? *If we believe in Jesus, whom God sent, we will be saved by faith! We can then surrender our lives to Jesus Christ. He did all the work for us when he died on the cross for our sins, and rose on the third day. No work that we could do can ever come close to that! By believing that Christ has the power to save, we allow Him to change our hearts, we can live in communion with God and spend all of eternity with Him! Once we have died to sin and are alive in Christ, we serve him out of joy, not religious obligation!*

Reflection

Think about the words of James echo what Jesus said about how to recognize real believers when he preached the Sermon on the Mount – “Thus you will recognize them by their fruit.” Matthew 7:20

This fruit is not just religious rituals, but a life that is wholly dedicated to serving God. Take some moments to reflect on your own actions. Would someone that didn’t know you see the “fruit” of your faith in God? Would they think to themselves, “This person looks like a friend of God!” *This is not a time to look at the actions of others and point judgmental fingers at each other. This is a time to look inward into our own hearts, and let God show us what parts of our lives are acting out our faith, and what parts are falling short.*

Wrap Up

Start the prayer time off by silently confessing to God the areas in your life that are not producing any fruit. Then pray together as a group, asking God to increase our faith and to show us opportunities to demonstrate our faith in Him with our actions. Acknowledge that our actions are not what save us, but our actions are what tell the world about our saving faith. Pray that we God would show us how to use our everyday actions to bring Jesus’ love to our friends, neighbors, and family.