

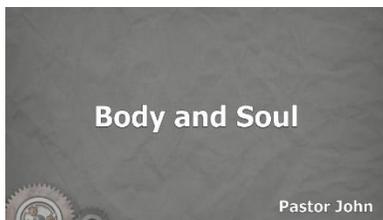
Body and Soul

September 9, 2018

James 2: 1-17

¹ My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? ² For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, ³ and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," ⁴ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? ⁷ Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you? ⁸ You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." ⁹ But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹ For the one who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment. ¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not

supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷ So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.



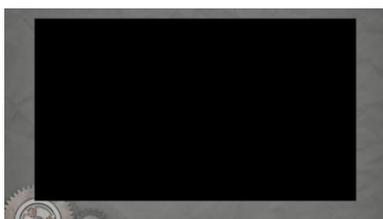
Let us pray...

Last week we began this current series as we looked at a passage from James 1 and the message to “just do it”. To quickly review, James calls us to an active and engaged faith, to a faith that is willing to listen to the call of God and to respond with action on our part. The first question in your GPS homework for last week was this: *“How will you, as a child of God, be a blessing to someone this week?”* Did anyone experience this sometime last week? Did your faithful response to God’s call result in someone being blessed last week?

1) How will you, as a child of God, be a blessing to someone this week?

Today we begin with our key verse. Verse 14 from James 2 reads: *“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?”* Take a minute and consider how this verse might (or might not) apply to you. Take a minute.

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say that you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?”
- James 2:14



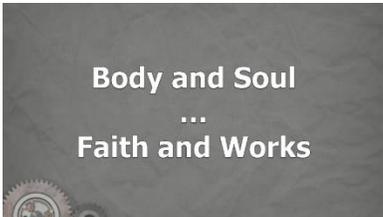
(Play video – “The Least”)



Body and Soul

I hope today is a great day at church for us. I hope you go from here and love others with the love of Jesus. I hope you leave and do discuss the finer points of the sermon – with your family, with a friend, maybe just within your own heart and mind. I hope the discomfort you find this week is not the warmth of the sun but the fire of the Holy Spirit at work within you, refining and shaping your faith. I hope as you return next Sunday, ready to worship again, that you are not the same Christian as you are today. I hope you return ready to be filled again with the power of God to go out and engage those who are addicted, thirsty, abused, wrongfully treated. May it be so for each of us this week.

Our overall idea today is that a healthy relationship with God requires both faith and works. Our soul must be engaged in the things of God – in worship, in Bible study and reflection, in prayer, in resisting temptation. Our body must be also engaged in the works of God – caring for those in need, being present with those who are hurting, serving our church and our community. So, in many ways, our relationship with God comes with some responsibilities, shall we say. And, our relationship with God also has some privileges, so to speak. We live without fear of the end, we are assured of our salvation, there is contentment in the trials, and so on.

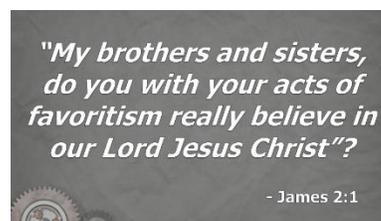


Body and Soul ... Faith and Works

Our relationship with God will also affect our relationships with each other and especially with those outside our families and outside of our close circles of friends. This is where James tends to focus. His question for us would be:

do we have a firm grasp on the privileges and responsibilities that our relationship with God has on our relationship with others? James wants our faith to manifest itself in our lives and in our relationships with the “other”. For James, the way we treat others tests the health of our relationship with God. As we work through James 2:1-17 today, I invite you to consider the health of your relationship with God and, consequently, the health of your relationship with those you encounter.

The opening thirteen verses of James 2 deal with showing favoritism, partiality, and being judgmental. James begins the chapter with a good question: *“My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ?”* James uses the illustration of how we treat a rich person compared to how we treat a poor person. By framing the question through the life and lens of Jesus, James was asking the early Christians if they were really following Jesus, if they were really acting as Jesus acted. In essence, James was asking them to treat everyone the same. This would have been the meaning in the original Greek. The more literal translation for the word “favoritism” that we find in our text today would have been “receiving the face”. In the context of the day when James was writing, this would mean to make judgment about people based upon external appearances. As we saw in our opening video, it can be easy for church-goers to overlook or look past those who are different or past those who we see as less than themselves. As the illustration continues to unfold, James speaks against making distinctions between people. In verse 7, he even implies that when we do make distinctions between people and between us and them, that we are



"blaspheming the excellent name that was invoked over you". That is a pretty serious charge.

In the next verse, James returns to the discussion concerning the law that we touched on last week as well. In verse 8, James writes, *"You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'"*. Here is good example of James channeling

"You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'".

- James 2:8

his inner Jesus who was quoting from the book of Leviticus when He named the greatest commandments. From here, James continues in the next few verses to make sure that we understand that we cannot pick and choose who we will love. If we do pick and choose who we will love, then we are not following this commandment from the Law. He reminds us that if we fail in one point of the law, we are accountable for all of it. Failing in one point of the law, according to James, is to fail in all of the law. Put another way, if we have one sin in our lives, we are separated from God just as much as if we have ten sins in our lives. This again connects back to the idea that we are to see all people the same. We cannot see one group or segment of society differently than we see another. We must see all people as God's beloved children. For the writer of Leviticus, for Jesus, and for James, when we see all people as God's children, then this will lead us to love all of our neighbors as ourselves.

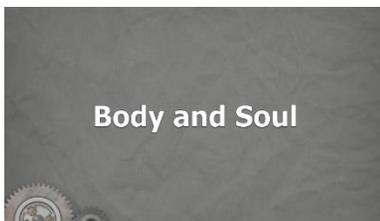
In our passage today, the transition from how we see people to how we act towards people begins in verse 14. This is the verse we began today with. Once again, this verse reads: *"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have*

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say that you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?"

- James 2:14

faith but do not have works? Can faith save you”? In James’ line of thinking, our faith must lead to action. We must be careful here, because this line is one that, in the past, caused much consternation surrounding the book of James.

Martin Luther, the man who began the Reformation in the 1500s, called the book of James a “book of straw”, such was his conflict with this verse. Martin Luther even went so far as to argue that the book did not belong in the Bible. Luther believed in faith by salvation alone and saw James’ work as supporting a works-based salvation. Luther’s original conflict with the Catholic church was centered on the church’s selling of indulgences, which allowed people to “buy” forgiveness for their sins. This conflict stood upon Luther’s newfound understanding that salvation was by grace alone. We too cling to this idea that we are saved by grace. We believe as Luther believed: we do not deserve grace and we cannot do anything to earn grace. We see grace as the free gift of God. Luther’s reading of James led to the conflict – but the conflict was largely in Luther’s mind. James would agree that salvation came through grace alone. For James, God’s grace should prompt us towards good works. These good works, in turn, demonstrate the power of grace for those in need of grace.



When one puts these two ideas together – that we are to see others as God sees them and that we are to live out a faith that is active and engaged – it leads us to question where we can offer good works. It leads us to ask where are people in our community suffering today because of favoritism, partiality, judging, and prejudice? The beginning of our passage today pointed towards those who have apparent external differences. I would like to suggest that those who are

experiencing the wrong side of favoritism and partiality, those who are adversely experiencing judgment and prejudice in their lives can largely be identified by external differences such as race, ethnicity, socio-economic status. For James, these differences are a matter of the heart. When we carry personal, internal, negative thoughts about certain types of people, it impacts our behaviors and reactions towards them. It inhibits our ability to truly love and to openly minister to those in need of Jesus.

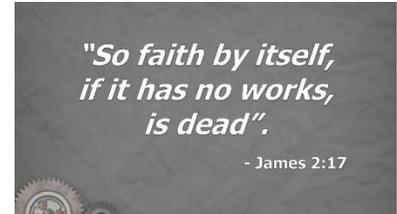
When we think of need in our community, are there people in need of the basics – shelter and food and clothing? Yes, there are folks in need of these things right here in our community. Now we are not going to get into the systemic forces at work today that create poverty and we are not going to believe that we can end poverty in Winner overnight. Widening our net a little bit – are there people in our community struggling with addiction and abuse? Are there people who feel broken and lost? Again, we are not going to somehow miraculously rid the city of addiction and we are not going to end all the pain and hurt in our community. The question that James would ask us, instead, is this: how can we simply minister to those in need?

In verses 15 and 16, James asks us, *"If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"* If all we do is wish someone well in their search for food or shelter or clothing, what good are we really doing if we do not meet the needs that we can meet? If we tell someone we hope they escape an abusive relationship but do nothing

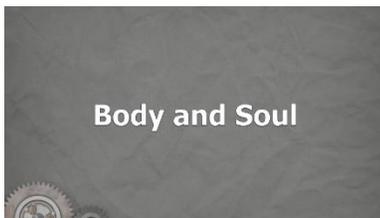
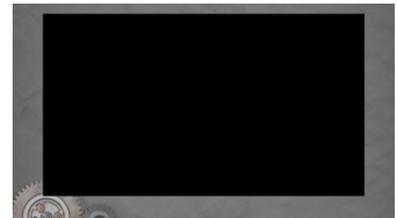
"If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says, 'Go in peace...' and yet do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?"

- James 2:15-16

to actually help them find another choice, what good are we really doing? This would be like me walking past an elderly person struggling to their car with two armfuls of groceries and saying, "Keep it up" without stopping to ask if I could help carry their bags to their car. It would be like knowing a neighbor with a broken-down car needs to get to their AA meeting and praying for them but not offering to give them a ride to the meeting. As James writes at the end of our passage, *"So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead"*. If all we have is a faith that exists and lives only within ourselves or even just within the walls of our church, then our faith is weak and selfish. If all we have is personal, private faith and it does not ever manifest itself in our world and in the lives of others, then our faith is indeed dead.



As we draw to a conclusion today, I again invite you to turn your attentions to the screens for a short video that addresses the needs present in our community, in our nation, and in our world. Please watch.



As you watched the first part of the video, did anyone come to mind? Did the addicted young man remind you of the kid next door? Did the broken man remind you of the guy who comes into the store at least once a week? Did the lost person remind you of the young, single guy you work with? Did the stuck woman remind you of the mother who drops her kids off at school just ahead of you dropping of your kids each day? These folks are all around us.

I would like to close today with the encouraging words we just saw on the screen. Jesus is the hope of the world. We are His hands and feet. It is time for the church, for Jesus' church, for our church, to share the hope that we have, to give what we can to meet needs. It is time to act on our calling to love the least and the lost. It is time to step out, to reach out, to meet the need. It is time to bring Jesus to those in need, to restore hope in body and soul.

As you may have surmised from the message today, James is a challenging book. Earlier I asked you to consider the health of your relationship with God. According to James, our faith must manifest itself in our lives and in our relationships with the "other". Remember, the way that we treat others is the test of the health of our relationship with God. When we tend well to our soul, it leads to the body being at work for God. When we are at work for God, we tend well to the relationships in our lives – both to our family and friends as well as to the broken, lost, hurting, and least among us. May your body and soul be well. May it bring honor and glory to God in all that you do this week. Amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) What people or groups of people are negatively affected by favoritism, partiality, judging, and prejudice here in our community?
- 2) Pray each day this week for the person or group of people you just named.
- 3) In practical terms, what can you do to minister to this situation? What are your first few steps to live out your faith to bring hope...?