

December 20

James 1-5

Jude 1-25

I'm Lori Eccleston, Executive Assistant to Pastor Mark. I'm standing in the Atrium at CCC and you can tell by the lights in the trees, planning is in full swing in every ministry here as we are preparing to celebrate the birth of Jesus. I personally invite you to join us at one of our services this Christmas Eve. Bring your family, friends, and neighbors. It will be a joyous celebration of the birth of our Savior! Check out our website for more details.

If you've been reading along with us in Project 4:4, you know that we read about the birth of Christ on October 20. Today's readings took us to the book of James and Jude. There are striking parallels between the 'sins' of the first century Jewish church and the sins of the 21st century church. The very concerns that James had for his fellow believers are our concerns as we look at our own circumstance. Real faith, he insists, evidences itself in the way that we live: in the way we respond to trials, to rich people, to those in need. We face trials of many kinds, but they are good for us because they develop in us perseverance and maturity and help us to become complete in Christ.

Many people have tried to invent a contradiction between what James writes here and what Paul teaches in his epistles. If you only look at the surface, there is a contradiction because James says that Abraham was considered righteous because of what he did, while Paul insists that it was by faith and faith alone that Abraham was justified.

The first thing to remember as we think about this problem is that when James wrote this letter, Paul had not yet written any of his letters and so had not made any of his remarks about justification by faith alone. The key is understanding what James and Paul each meant by faith. What James is calling "dead" or "non-existent" faith is what we would call mere intellectual assent. *"You believe that there is one God? Good. Even the demons believe that, and shudder"* (2:14). What Paul means when he talks about faith is not intellectual assent, but the attitude of taking my entire life and trusting it to Christ - relying entirely upon Him and Him only for my salvation. The faith about which Paul has been speaking is not the idle faith which James condemns, but a faith that works. It works itself out through love.

The one theme that runs right through the five short chapters of this letter is that real Christianity evidences itself in the way that we live. It shows itself practically in our lives. It makes us *"doers of the Word, not just hearers"*! In chapter 1 he talked about how "real faith" responds in the face of temptation. In chapter 2 he talks about how real faith does not pander to the wealthy. Real faith produces good works - *"Pure religion,"* he said, *"is to look after the widows and orphans and keep yourself unspotted from the world."*

In chapter 3, real Christianity shows itself in our control of our tongues, and in a lifestyle that evidences wisdom. It is seen, (in chapter 4,) in a peaceable lifestyle that avoids the snare of a worldly and materialistic mindset. Finally, in chapter 5, the fair treatment of others, patience in the midst of suffering, and an attitude of fervent, faith-filled prayer are 'the proof of the pudding.'

James' remarks, about the devastating power of our tongues, are so important. Our tongues have enormous power both for good and for evil. Of all the sins of which Christians are guilty, I wonder if the thoughtless use of our tongues is the most significant. Words spoken in haste can be repented of, but they cannot be called back. Once uttered, they remain, and the damage they cause can be very profound.

We have it in our power today to bless or to curse, to build or to tear down, to encourage or to demoralize the people with whom we have contact. Use the enormous power of your words to edify and build the Body of Christ. In this epistle, which so emphasizes putting our faith into action, there is an understanding that in a very important way, our words are actions!

This injunction to call for the elders to pray and anoint with oil demands is worth our attention. It is apparent here that sometimes sickness is related to sin in the life of the Christian. While it is by no means the only reason for illness, if we are sick because of sin, and we confess our sins, and have the elders pray for us, we will be healed.

Second, we must see that there is a connection between our faith and the effectiveness of our prayers.

Third, James tells us that there is an equally strong connection between righteousness and answered prayer. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

A very ancient account by an early church historian says that when he died, James' knees were calloused like a camel's knees because of all the time he spent in prayer.

Well it is hard to believe that it has been almost two years ago when Pastor Mark called me into his office to talk about a plan that he had for the entire church, a plan he hoped would change us all...from the very youngest children, students, adults to our very wise, mature seniors. We've sold over 5300 Bibles this past year! In just 11 short days, our Project 4:4 journey will come to an end and I pray this year has been a year of great growth for you spiritually, that your relationship with God has increased and that you have a deeper understanding of God's word and how it applies to your life. I know it has changed mine! I'm grateful to all our staff that has helped bring you these daily accelerators. Please thank them the next time you see one of them. This is the last accelerator I'll be bringing you for the year. Hope to see you around CCC, I'd love to meet you!

I'd like to leave you with one of my favorite blessings....

May the road rise up to meet you,

May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
May the rains fall softly on your fields,
And until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.