LIFE GROUP LESSON

THE BOOK OF JAMES - FAITH WORKS - WEEK OF NOV. 8

Goal: to understand faith without works is dead, and yet, pride with works is dangerous. Our motivation for good works must derive from a genuine faith in Christ; otherwise, the evil desires at war within us lead to usurping God's authority … and every area of our lives is affected.

- Share a take-away from this week's sermon, Faith Works, James, chapter four.

Introduction

Genuine kindness, goodwill, and generosity are choices that come from the heart of individuals, not a mandate of government. When good works are rooted in faith, people are genuinely inspired … not intimidated. The opening story in this week's message outline spoke of how harsh conditions and 'war guilt' created deep humiliation and economic hardship in Germany in the early 20th Century. As a result, when chancellor Adolf Hitler began speaking of a glorious comeback, a rise and resurgence in the economy, and reform of the German people, it almost sounded like a call for good works. But something was off.

Citizens became forced to conform to one man's agenda. What initially sounded like charity rapidly became aggressive state-sanctioned extortion. The government took 'wages for sacrifice' deducted from a worker's paycheck. The Lord's Day was hijacked; family worship and Sunday dinners were turned into 'Stew Sunday' when families were forced to give to their local Nazi block warden what they would have spent on dinner. Any refusing to give were labeled with mandatory lapel badges, publicly humiliated, and fired from jobs due to 'community treason.' In this series, we have learned faith without works is dead, and yet, pride with works is dangerous. It is an imposter that schemes and kills to get its way.

Read James 4:1-10

Discussion:

- James asks: "What do you think the Scriptures mean when they say that the spirit God has placed within us is filled with envy?" (v5) What do you think James means?
- Look up the word/idea of 'hedonism' … in what ways has this belief infiltered our culture today? In what ways is this philosophical belief counter to Christ's teachings? (see Mark 8:34-38)
- The world is opposed to God and his Kingdom. What did Jesus say to his disciples on the eve of his betrayal and arrest in John 15:18-20. (see also John 17:14-16)
- Notice what Jesus says before Pontius Pilate: "My Kingdom is not an earthly kingdom. If it were, my followers would fight to keep me from being handed over to the Jewish leaders. But my Kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). If you have professed faith in the Lord Jesus, why is it important to remember who you are in Christ? … and where your true citizenship is? (see also Philippians 3:20)

Hear the words Paul wrote believers in Corinth: "Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God. As the Scriptures say, 'He traps the wise in the snare of their own cleverness. 'And again, 'The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise; he knows they are worthless'" (1 Corinthians 3:18-20). Both Paul and James regard humility as essential when it comes to our relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We have nothing apart from Christ. He gave up everything so we could be saved (John 17:19).

- Often, we think we deserve, or have earned, or somehow have achieved our wealth and status … that somehow in our own strength or cunning, we have pulled ourselves up by our own bootstraps, as the saying goes. But what does king David declare when he prays before the whole assembly of Israel? Read:

"O our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name! But who am I, and who are my people, that we could give anything to you? Everything we have has come from you, and we give you only what you first gave us! We are here for only a moment, visitors and strangers in the land as our ancestors were before us. Our days on earth are like a passing shadow, gone so soon without a trace" (1 Chronicles 29:13-15).

- What can we do to resist the devil, according to James 4:7-10?

Read James 4:11-17

Prideful competition, judging others, and boasting about tomorrow distances us from the Lord. James says slandering/judging our neighbor is the same as slandering God's law (v11). Our job is to obey the law. "God alone, who gave the law, is the Judge. He alone has the power to save or to destroy. So what right do you have to judge your neighbor" (v12).

- Why is it not our job to judge?
- What are barriers to genuine faith at work, according to this weekend's message?
- In what areas of your life might you be pridefully living as a practical atheist, "… having a form of godliness, but denying its power" (2 Timothy 3:5 NKJV).

Jewish believers to whom James writes would have been familiar with itinerant businessmen/merchants who learned to be assertive as a solution to their poverty and/or low social status. Yet, he warns against self-confidence in vv13-16 and says what we ought to say is: "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that" (v15). None of us knows what the future holds. Only the Lord knows; Jesus says: "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will brings its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today" (Matthew 6:33-34).

In Closing

Come close to God and he will come close to you. Each week in this message series, the subject matter has been convicting. James tells it like it is. He admits 'we have all made many mistakes' (James 3:2a) for there was a point when even James and his brothers did not yet believe Jesus was sent by God from heaven (see John 7:1-5). But there comes a time for each of us when we must decide: will I live to glorify Christ or myself? May we wash our hands, as James says, and purify our hearts so our loyalty is not divided between God and the world. Lord, forgive us. Help us. Thank you for giving grace to stand against the evil desires that wage war within us. Lord, we humbly yield to your sovereignty and love.

One Year Bible Readings

Nov. 8: Ezekiel 18:1-19:14, Hebrews 9:1-10, Psalm 106:32-48, Prov. 27:10
Nov. 9: Ezekiel 20:1-49, Hebrews 9:11-28, Psalm 107:1-43, Prov. 27:11
Nov. 10: Ezekiel 21:1-22:31, Hebrews 10:1-17, Psalm 108:1-13, Prov. 27:12
Nov. 11: Ezekiel 23:1-49, Hebrews 10:18-39, Psalm 109:1-31, Prov. 27:13
Nov. 12: Ezekiel 24:1-26:21, Hebrews 11:1-16, Psalm 110:1-7, Prov. 27:14
Nov. 13: Ezekiel 27:1-28:26, Hebrews 11:17-31, Psalm 111:1-10, Prov. 27:15-16
Nov. 14: Ezekiel 29:1-30:26, Hebrews 11:32-12:13, Psalm 112:1-10, Prov. 27:17

THE BOOK OF JAMES

faith WORKS

Text: James 4

Plain Truth:

Faith works when _____ overcomes _____ and _____ actions are replaced by _____ _____.

1. Envy that produces _____.

2. Pridefully living as a practical _____.
   a. Prideful _____
   b. _____ others
   c. _____ about tomorrow

3. _____ with the world.

4. We fail to _____ Satan and draw near to _____.

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