

REAL-LIFE RELIGION

WHAT DOES THAT PHRASE “Real-Life Religion” MEAN TO YOU? SURELY THERE MUST BE AS MANY IDEAS ON THE SUBJECT AS THERE ARE PEOPLE SITTING HERE THIS MORNING, AND YET THERE ARE ALSO IDEAS COMMON TO US ALL ON THE SUBJECT.

JAMES’ LETTER IS ONE IN WHICH WE CAN TAKE IDEAS AND APPLY THEM DIRECTLY TO OUR DAILY LIVING. I BELIEVE FOR THAT REASON THAT DEFINES “Real-Life Religion”.

JESUS DID NOT SPEND A LARGE PORTION OF HIS TIME INSIDE THE SYNAGOGUE PONDERING OR DEBATING OVER WHAT WE WOULD CALL TODAY “*THEOLOGY*”. NO, JESUS WAS OUT THERE WITH THE PEOPLE IN MINISTRY. HE TOLD PEOPLE IN HIS OWN WORDS WHAT GOD WAS REALLY LIKE, WHAT HE DESIRES IN OUR LIVES, AND HOW TO DO IT! HE RELATED IN PARABLES THAT THE PEOPLE PLAINLY UNDERSTOOD BECAUSE SUCH THINGS HAPPENED IN THEIR DAILY LIVES--JESUS TOLD HOW GOD “OPERATED” AND HOW HE DESIRED US TO OPERATE.

JAMES HITS HARD ON ONE SUBJECT OVER AND OVER. LAST WEEK IT WAS STATED FOR US ***NOT TO BE JUST HEARERS OF THE WORD, BUT DOERS!*** THIS WEEK JAMES HITS THE SUBJECT HEAD-ON; ***FAITH WITH OUT WORKS IS DEAD!!!!*** NOW THAT IS ABOUT AS Real-Life Religion AS YOU CAN GET. WHERE RELIGION HITS REAL LIFE, OUR LIFE IS IN RELATIONSHIPS. I ADMIT IT IS THE HARDEST THING WE DO, WHY, BECAUSE IT’S WORK! WE HAVE TO WORK AT IT, EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US. NO MATTER THE RELATIONSHIP – WITH GOD, WITH OUR SPOUSE, WITH OUR BROTHER OR SISTER, MOTHER OR FATHER OR FRIENDS. **A GOOD RELATIONSHIP DOES NOT COME AUTOMATICALLY. IN PART, A REASON RELATIONSHIPS ARE DIFFICULT IS BECAUSE WE DO HAVE TO WORK AT THEM** AND FOR A NUMBER OF US THAT ISN’T WHAT WE WANT TO DO!

JAMES’ LETTER THOUGH IS SO HELPFUL AND PRACTICAL AND DOESN’T MIX WORDS. HE MIGHT HAVE BEEN EVEN GOOD AT TODAY’S “TEXTING” WITH HIS EASILY-IDENTIFIED EXAMPLES AND EVEN BEEN EASILY UNDERSTAND IN TODAY’S MODERN WORLD.

JAMES BEGINS THIS PART OF HIS LETTER BY SAYING **OUR FAITH SHOULD NOT HAVE AN ATTITUDE OF PERSONAL FAVORITISM** OR AS *THE MESSAGE* PUTS IT “DON’T LET PUBLIC OPINION INFLUENCE THE WAY YOU LIVE OUT YOUR FAITH! I CONTINUE TO BE AMAZED HOW THE BIBLE “HITS” ON TOPICS OF OUR DAY, THINGS WE FACE AT WORK, SCHOOL, HOME, AND EVEN CHURCH.

JAMES USES THE RICH AND THE POOR MAN, BUT I THOUGHT ABOUT THIS AND CAME UP WITH A QUESTION FOR ALL OF US. **ARE OUR “PREFERENCES” REALLY PERSONAL FAVORITISM?** NOW IF I HAVEN'T BROUGHT THE HACKLES UP ON ANYONE YET, STOP AND THINK OF IT THIS WAY. **WHEN WE PREFER SOMETHING OVER SOMETHING ELSE, AREN'T WE REALLY FAVORING ONE OVER THE OTHER? BY THAT FAVORING ONE OVER ANOTHER THEN ARE WE NOT EXCLUDING THE OTHER?**

NOW JAMES USES PEOPLE IN THIS FIRST EXAMPLE AND FAVORING ONE OVER ANOTHER IS INDEED WRONG. JAMES GOES AS FAR AS SAYING IN VERSE 9 THAT *YOU SIN BY SHOWING FAVORITISM*. PEOPLE ARE NOT THE ONLY AREA WHERE WE CAN SHOW THIS. *HOW ABOUT IDEAS?* IF WE FAVOR ONLY ONE WAY TO DO SOMETHING TO THE EXCLUSION OF ANOTHER WAY THEN ACCORDING TO JAMES WE, IN OUR FAITH, HAVE AN ATTITUDE OF FAVORITISM!!! AND THAT IS WRONG!!!!

LOOK AT THE BIGGER PICTURE OF WHAT THESE VERSES ARE SAYING TO EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US – **BE OPEN**. I HAD A YOUNG ADULT SAY TO ME ONCE *“I DO WANT TO BE HEARD, BUT I WANT ALSO TO BE LISTENED TO”*. DO WE SHOWING A NEGATIVE FAVORITISM BECAUSE THIS YOUNG ADULT WAS YOUNG?

I REMEMBER SO VIVIDLY IN A SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS I TAUGHT WHERE AGES RANGED FROM COLLEGE AGE TO PEOPLE WHO HAD BEEN AROUND FOR QUITE AWHILE. A YOUNG ADULT COMMENTED ON A SCRIPTURE AND TOO MANY OF US IN THE GROUP THERE WAS A WHOLE LOT OF WISDOM IN THE WORDS HE SPOKE. I WOULD GO SO FAR AS SAYING THAT THE YOUNG MAN RECEIVED A WORD OF WISDOM FROM THE LORD THAT DAY--A GIFT GOD GIVES TO ANYONE OF ANY AGE AT AN APPROPRIATE TIME.

THERE ARE MANY OTHER AREAS OF OUR DAILY LIVES WHERE, **BECAUSE OF FAVORITISM WE MISS OUT ON IMPORTANT THINGS**. REMEMBER THIS – **GOD SHOWS NO FAVORITISM AND MANY VERSES IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT FROM GENESIS TO JAMES TELLS US JUST THAT**. JUST LAST WEEK IN THE COMMUNION LITURGY WE HEARD *“CHRIST DIED FOR US WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS; THAT PROVES GOD'S LOVE TOWARD US.”* HE LOVES US ALL!!! IN GALATIANS 3:28 YOU KNOW THE VERSE ABOUT *NO JEW NO GENTILE, NO MALE OR FEMALE HAS THE VERSE ENDING WITH WE ARE ALL ONE IN CHRIST JESUS*. **ARE THOSE “JUST” WORDS THAT WE GIVE LIP SERVICE TO, BUT NEVER USE IN OUR DAILY LIVES?** BE NOT JUST HEARERS BUT DOERS OF THE WORD – THAT IS REAL-LIFE RELIGION.

JUST THINK OF ALL THE LAWS THAT HAVE BEEN PASSED IN THIS COUNTRY TO “GRANT” EQUAL RIGHTS. IF WE HAD BEEN FOLLOWING JAMES' ADVICE AND OUR FAITH BY NOT SHOWING FAVORITISM, TREATING EACH ONE EQUAL AND LOVING THEM COULD HAVE BEEN A DIFFERENT

STORY! MARTIN LUTHER KING TOUCHED ON THIS SUBJECT IN HIS *"I HAVE A DREAM" SPEECH* AND OTHER SPEECHES, BECAUSE AFTER ALL HE WAS A MINISTER AND KNEW THE WORD OF GOD. **WHEN WE LOOK BACK IN HISTORY MANY OF THE GREATEST IDEAS AND HIGHEST IDEALS HAVE THEIR FOUNDATIONS IN THE BIBLE.**

NOW WE ALL KNOW **IT IS NOT NATURAL TO BE IMPARTIAL.** GOD KNOWS THIS AND JAMES DID TOO! IT IS, I BELIEVE WHY IN VERSE 8 HE REMINDS US OF THE *"ROYAL LAW"* THAT YOU SHOULD *"LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF"*. **THERE IS NO WAY IN OUR HUMANNESS THAT WE CAN LOVE THOSE AROUND US LET ALONE THE UNLOVABLE, UNLESS WE HAVE THAT LOVE OF JESUS CHRIST THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT.**

THAT LEADS US TO THE SECOND POINT **JAMES IS TRYING TO CHALLENGE US AS WELL AS ENCOURAGE US WITH – FAITH AND WORKS.** I DISCOVERED A MEANINGFUL DEFINITION WHEN PREPARING THIS SERMON. *FAITH IS SOMETHING THAT TRUSTS AND OBEYS GOD, WHILE WORKS LOVES GOD AND OTHERS.* THOSE DEFINITIONS OF FAITH AND WORKS GO HAND IN HAND WITH THE NEXT VERSES IN JAMES.

HERE IS ANOTHER WAY TO VIEW FAITH AND WORKS. THE STORY GOES THAT

An old boatman painted the word "faith" on one oar of his boat and "works" on the other. He was asked his reason for this. In answer, he slipped the oar with "faith" into the water and rowed. The boat, of course, made a very tight circle. Returning to the dock, the boatman then said, "Now, let's try 'works' without 'faith' and see what happens. The oar marked "works" was put in place and the boatman began rowing with just the "works" oar. Again the boat went into a tight circle but in the opposite direction.

When the boatman again returned to the wharf, he interpreted his experiment in these strong and convincing words, "You see, to make a passage across the lake, one needs both oars working simultaneously in order to keep the boat in a straight and narrow way. If one does not have the use of both oars, one makes no progress either across the lake or as a Christian.

ANOTHER VERY PRACTICAL AND TO THE POINT EXAMPLE IS GIVEN IN THESE VERSES. **ESSENTIALLY THERE IS SOMEONE IN NEED AND ALL THAT IS PROVIDED IS TALK.** WE HAVE A WELL USED PHRASE, NOT FROM THE BIBLE THAT EVEN ONE NOT A CHRISTIAN USES – *"TALK IS CHEAP"* SIMPLY **MEANING IF THERE IS NOT ACTION FOLLOWING THE TALK THEN YOUR WORDS ARE WORTHLESS.** WE CAN APPLY THAT HERE TOO – **ALL THE GOD-TALK IN THE WORLD DOESN'T MEAN A THING IF NOT FOLLOWED BY GOD-ACTION.**

I HAVE SAID MANY TIMES THAT **RELIGION IS NOT RULES, BUT RELATIONSHIPS AND IN ORDER TO HAVE RELATIONSHIPS THERE MUST BE ACTION!!! THIS IS SO TRUE OF OUR RELATION-**

SHIP WITH CHRIST. WE CAN COME EVERY SUNDAY, GO TO BIBLE STUDY AND HEAR ALL ABOUT JESUS. WE CAN HEAR ABOUT HOW HE HAS AFFECTED THOSE AROUND US,

BUT UNTIL WE TAKE ACTION TO SEEK OUT THAT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM AND MAKE HIM OUR OWN, OUR FAITH WILL BE INCOMPLETE ONE, NOT ONE FROM WITHIN THE HEART, WHICH COMES BY EXPERIENCE. JOHN WESLEY WAS A GREAT BELIEVER THAT WHEN ONE HAS A RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST THAT THERE WILL COME OUTWARD SIGNS OF IT – THE GOOD WORKS!

THIS SUBJECT OF FAITH AND WORKS REMINDS ME OF THE SAYING “*Choose a job you love and you will never have to work a day in your life.*” **WHEN WE HAVE THE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST AND WALK BY THE SPIRIT, WORKS WILL NOT BE WORK AT ALL BUT COME FROM WITHIN OUT OF THE LOVE FOR GOD.**

WE CANNOT PROFESS TO BE A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST AND NOT PRACTICE THAT WHICH HE LIVED OUT DAILY. JESUS HAD A REAL-LIFE RELIGION. WITH FAITH IN THE FATHER, CHRIST WENT TO THE CROSS! I AM REMINDED OF THE VERSE FROM ISAIAH THAT JESUS QUOTED IN MATTHEW 15:8 “*These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.*” JAMES’ EXAMPLE IN VERSES 15 AND 16 IS A PERFECT ILLUSTRATION OF LIP SERVICE AND NOT HONORING GOD BY DOING GOOD WORKS, MAYBE WE SHOULD CALL IT “GOD-WORKS”.

IN GALATIANS 5:13 REMEMBER THESE WORDS “*It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don’t use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that’s how freedom grows.*” THIS IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF FAITH **WITH WORKS!** **FAITH**, AS JAMES PUTS IT FOR THE READER IS FROM THE GREEK WORD **MEANS “TO HAVE TRUST AND TO OBEY”.**

JAMES GIVES US FOUR DESCRIPTIONS OF FAITH –

- SAVING FAITH INCLUDES DEEDS OR WORK,
- FAITH WITHOUT WORKS OR ACTIONS IS DEAD,
- FAITH CANNOT ONLY BE MENTAL OR INTELLECTUAL, AND
- BIBLICAL FAITH IS ACTIVE OBEDIENCE.

THE GREAT FAITH CHAPTER OF ROMANS IS FILLED WITH THOSE OLD TESTAMENT PEOPLE WHO TRUSTED AND OBEYED GOD ABRAHAM.

WORKS CAN BE OF TWO VARIETIES.

- One is works of the flesh, all those things we are to put aside when we become that new person in Christ.
- The second is the works of the spirit as listed as the fruits of the spirit.

WILL WE BE PERFECT IN ATTEMPTING TO PRACTICE SUCH THINGS – CERTAINLY NOT!!! BUT HEAR ME--**GOD DESIRES PROGRESS NOT PERFECTION.** FAITH IS ACTION AND IT IS PUTTING OUR FAITH TO WORK IN OUR DAILY LIVES. THAT IS REAL-LIFE RELIGION, NOT SOMETHING WE HEAR ON SUNDAY MORNING AND IMMEDIATELY FORGETS.

THERE WAS A LONG LINE OF INITIALS USED IN A SEMINAR I WENT TO QUITE A LONG TIME AGO. WE HAD BUTTONS WITH THESE INITIALS ON IT THAT WE WORE AROUND THE VENUE. THE MESSAGE WAS ***BE PATIENT WITH ME; GOD IS NOT THROUGH WITH ME YET.*** THOSE WORDS ARE TRUE FOR EACH AND EVERY PERSON SITTING HERE THIS MORNING.

MAY WE NOT BE JUST HEARERS OF THE WORD, BUT DOERS AND MAY WE HAVE A FAITH WITH WORKS – THAT IS REAL-LIFE RELIGION.

AMEN.