

**A sermon preached at St. Michael and All Angels' Church, Sandhurst by
Emma Hodge on Sunday 9th September 2018**

Speak Lord, your servants are listening, you have the words of eternal life.

Today is one of the National Heritage Open Days and is also the second in our sermon series on the letter of James and this is no coincidence because at times throughout history the letter of James has been controversial as it contradicts Paul's teaching; Paul states that we achieve salvation by grace alone while James puts the emphasis on actions; but these are not contradictory, Paul states that we are saved by Grace¹ alone while James puts the emphasis on actions, actions because of faith and not actions to obtain faith. Paul and James look at the same problem and find different paths to reach the same solution. James is clear in his letter, our actions are as a result of our faith and because we have faith we will receive salvation

In last week's sermon, John Castle introduced us to the letter of James and for those of you who were not here last week, then allow me to provide a brief recap.

The letter of James is written by the half-brother of our Lord. James was not one of the original disciples but only came to belief after the Lord's resurrection. Last week, John provided us with this equation which can be used to describe the epistle of James.

$$A + B = CD$$

Attitude + Behaviour = Christian Discipleship

The letter of James is challenging from the very beginning of the letter when we are told to have *All Joy in times of Trial* and this gives an idea of the rest of the letter which is about practical religion and living our lives faithfully.

Today we are looking at the second chapter of James and it starts with a challenge about our ethics, or to use the word that "fits" John's formula – our attitudes. Ethics are the moral principles that guide our actions and there are many different areas of our lives with different ethical principles.

¹ Ephesians

The start of second chapter of James points this out by challenging us to treat both rich and poor the same.

In our society, while there are still divisions between rich and poor, there are other groups in our society; travellers, immigrants; those of other religions and we only need to look at the press and social media to see how secular society treats them, however we need to take James' words to heart and ensure that the way we treat them is influenced by our faith.

When I am not busy being churchwarden, I work for a clinical research company and ethics are a vital part of clinical research and we need approval from ethics committee before proceeding with a study or even a change in an existing study. However we don't just need approval from one ethics committee to take part in a study, studies are generally conducted in multiple countries so that each country needs to provide ethics committee approval, and with different countries have different ethical principles that guide their decision making as to whether a study can go ahead as it is or whether a change is required, or whether it needs to be put on hold, it is not uncommon for a study to go ahead in one country but not in another. The same principles apply to us Christians.

Our Christian Ethics may well differ from the secular ethics in our society so we need to look at each problem and see it, not through secular eyes but how God sees it and need to use the tools that we have been given, the bible (and that includes discussion and understanding the bible) as well as prayer.

We need to ignore our secular society's ethics about how we treat them but only through applying our Christian ethics will to the situations and issues in our society.

In today's global world, our society is not just the area we live in, through our actions and purchasing habits we interact with people across the globe and as such, we need to look at the global society as well. We need to be aware that people live in countries which can be described as corrupt, there are problems of modern slavery and human trafficking, as well as the issues across the world of women being treated and paid less than men. The companies that we use may publish statements and reports, but is it just meaningless words? It is no good having a statement saying that they are against modern slavery but then having goods for sale which are clearly

marked having been made in a country known for its corruption as well as having major issues of modern slavery and human trafficking.

While in our busy lives it is tempting to push the responsibility onto others, the directors of the companies for example, if we are to put our faith into action, which is what is at the heart of the second chapter of James, then we can't pass on the responsibility to others, especially to those who may not share our same ethical values.

James continues this chapter by looking back at two examples of the Jewish faith who displayed enormous faith; Abraham² and Rahab. As I don't have time to look at both of these in detail now, I'll focus on Rahab. Rahab³ risked her life for her faith. We may think that Rahab is unique at being willing to risk her life because of her faith, however as I was writing this sermon, I was reminded of a world war one nurse who gave her life because she insisted on treating the injured from all sides, her name was Edith Cavell, however these notable people are just two. There are hundreds of others who are willing to say no and risk their job, their career, the livelihood and even their life for saying no to society's ethics and yes to Christian ethics.

The second chapter of James puts the emphasis on actions,

Actions because our faith makes us do those actions.

Actions because we are listening to God and being His voice and his hands here on earth.

Actions because we fulfil the "Royal Law⁴" (which is the summary of the law – Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind and with all your Soul and to Love your neighbour as ourselves)

Actions because we care for our neighbour; Our next door neighbour, our neighbour in our community and our global neighbour.

Because we have the faith to stand up and speak for the injustice in the world whatever the cost (GULP!)

² Genesis 22 – Abraham and Issac

³ The Story of Rahab can be found in Joshua 2

⁴ Summary of the Law is at Matthew 22:37-40

James 2; Psalm 146; Mark 7:24-end

As the theme for today's service is "Faith without Action is Dead" the question to consider is

"What Action is your faith telling you to take?"