

August 25

Scriptures: Read James 2

Key Verse: “But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.” (James 2:18)

Overview

One of the great statements from the letter of James is, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world” (1:27, NIV). Contrast James’ “religion” with that of many others — the “religion” that is self-focused, self-absorbed, and self-defined; the religion that is embraced because of what it brings rather than for what it gives; the religion that reduces the great themes and music of scripture to a means of a worldly end — that end being personal pleasure; the religion that majors on “felt needs” and pays lip service to real needs; the religion that signs a cheque instead of taking the hand of the widow and the orphan.

It’s plain to see that James, this half-brother of Jesus and respected Jew, was disdainful of “airy-fairy” religion that majored in “warm fuzzies”. As he saw it, your religion was worthless if it wasn’t changing for the better the way you and others lived. We are not only to reach out to the disadvantaged, James says, but we’re also to keep our morality pure. We’re not to conform to the world but transform it. True religion entails both social and moral responsibility.

That’s why professed faith and practised faith are inseparable. That’s why James says, in effect, that you know it’s an apple tree if apples are growing from its branches. If it merely professes to be an apple tree, and nothing, or something other than apples, is growing, then it’s not an apple tree at all. The proof of the pudding is in the eating.

Prayer

O Lord, grant us Your help, that we might have a faith “that works”. May it work both in our outreach to needy people and our inreach for a life of moral purity. We pray this with confidence in Your love and power which works in our lives. Amen.