

Place: Lurgan Baptist 24:8:2003

Reading: Acts 15:12-21 James 1:1

PRACTICAL CHRISTIANITY

1. TO GOD BE THE GLORY

I am sure that James would have listened with something like glee to the old coloured preacher who said, “ *My brethren there be two sides to the gospel, there is the Believing side and there is the Behaving side.* ” The Book of James deals with the latter for James is the most intensely practical book of the N.T. This is a practical book dealing with everyday life for the man in the street. Yet it is not devoid of doctrine, as we shall see when we begin to dig into the text. As someone has put it “ *the distinctive value of James is his striking grasp of the integration of truth and life.* ” Now it is precisely this integration of truth and life that makes James so relevant for today. You see, even as believers we seem to have an almost incurable tendency to be unbalanced. We either major on accumulating truth, to the neglect of enthusiastic action or we dash around in a mad whirl of activity, to the neglect of truth and faith. James provides just the balance we need.

I heard about a student who was asked to name his favourite translation of the Bible. Do you know what he replied ? “ *My mother’s.* ” The questioner continued, “ *is that a translation into English ?* ” “ *No,* ” he replied, “ *it’s a translation into action.* ” That in a nutshell is James’s great concern. His point is this if you say you believe why do you act like you don’t. My This book is a plea for reality and is that not we need today ? Many of us are long on theory but short on practice, many of us hear the Word but few of us do it. Many of us profess, but few of us practice. Now these first century Christians were struggling with problems in their personal lives and in their church fellowship. They were going through difficult testings. They were also facing temptations to sin. Some of the believers were catering to the rich. Church members were competing for offices in the church. The tongue was another serious problem. Worldliness was another problem.

My these Christians don’t appear any different from 21st Christians today. For are these not the problems we face ? Now when we come to the N.T. we discover that there were several men who bore this name James. There was:

1. James, the son of Zebedee, and brother of John. A fisherman by trade he was the first of the disciples to give his life for Christ, martyred by Herod in AD44.

(Acts 12:1-2)

2. James, the son of Alphaeus, he was another of the disciples. (Matt 10:3 Acts 1:13)

3. James, the father of Judas (not Iscariot) the disciple.

4. James, our Lord's half brother, born and raised in the same family. (mat 13:55 Mk 6:3 Gal 1:19) Now it is generally accepted that it was “ *James, the Lord's brother,* ” (Gal 1:19) that wrote this letter and that it was written at some time between AD44 AD49. Now having given you that bit of background lets come to our opening study, which we could call, “ ***To God be the Glory,*** ” Why ? Well, look at,

(1) THE POSITION THAT JAMES ADOPTS

“ *James a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,* ” (1:1) Now that word “ *servant,* ” is *doulos* which mean slave. Now do you see the position that James adopts ? That of a bond servant. Now this word implies three things. It indicates:

(a) ACTUAL HUMILITY:

It's the word of man who has literally denied himself who has said No to himself that he may ever say Yes to God. This is just about the lowest thing that James could possibly say. You see, James could have introduced himself in many ways. He could have introduced himself as “ *James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem,* ” (Acts 21:8) he could have introduced himself as “ *James, the pillar of the church.* ” (Gal 2:9)

He could have wrote, “ *James an apostle,* ” (Gal 1:19) or he could have introduced himself as “ *James, the Lord's brother.* ” (Gal 1:19) Now you talk about something that was impressive and gave weight to what he had to say. I can imagine if he were living today, the ads would have run in the paper, “ *The brother of the Lord Jesus will give his testimony,* ” “ *What it was like to grow up with Jesus,* ” but unlike some 21st century preachers who are always name-dropping he simply says, “ *James a servant of God.* ” Someone has said, “ *The great man never thinks he is great and the small man never thinks he is small.* ” One of the marks of greatness is humility. My if you want to be great in the eyes of God then like James you will see yourself as nothing but a servant.

Is that how you see yourself ? Or do you like to let others know who you rub shoulders with ? A native in Africa had been comparing two missionaries in his part of the country. “ *One of them,* ” he said “ *was unselfish, but the other was selfless.* ” Do you see the difference ? You its possible to be generous, hardworking, sacrificial and endlessly busy in the Lord's work, and yet to be eaten up with self ! You may be doing things, sharing things, giving things, but are you deliberately putting yourself in the position where you will not be noticed, and where no credit will be given to you ? Do you recall what Paul said of the Lord Jesus ? “ *He made Himself of no reputation,* ” (Phil 2:7) That seldom can be said of us. We have proud hearts and when that pride asserts itself it does so because we forget we have nothing of which we can be proud. “ *James, a bond servant,* ” (a)

(b) TOTAL PROPERTY:

You see, the slave was the absolute possession of his master. Do you remember Paul's words ?
“ *Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price.* ” (1 Cor 6:9) Now in the ancient world, a servant was not someone on a payroll, but someone who was part of his masters property. A servant, or bond-slave did not go around looking for a master, choosing one he liked, and then dictating the terms of his employment. No, the master did the choosing, and paid the price, sent him to work and as he owned him he had the right to expect loyal obedience. The servant never thought of privileges but of duties, not of rights but of obligations. The Lord Jesus said, “ *Ye have not chosen Me, but I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go forth and bring forth fruit.* ” (Jn 15:16)

Writing from Cambridge in 1883 C. T. Studd said, “ *I had known about Jesus dying for me, but I had never understood that if He had died for me then I did not belong to myself. Redemption means buying back, so that if I belonged to Him, either I had to be a thief and keep what was not mine, or else I had to give up everything to God. When I came to see that Jesus Christ had died for me, it did not seem hard to give up all for Him.* ” “ *Ye are not your own,* ” have you grasped that ? Do you recognise that you're the Lord's property ? Have you therefore surrendered everything to Him ? (a) (b)

(c) PERSONAL LOYALTY:

For when James says he is a bond-slave he means he is utterly pledged to his Master. Do you recall the O.T. slave who loved his master so much that he would not go out free ? (Exod 21: 6) His ear lobe was placed against the doorpost and then pierced. From that moment he bore the mark of a slave, a slave to the master he loved. Utterly pledged and loyal to his master. Is that you ? Now here is (1) Is this the position that you're adopting ? Do you have a lowly consideration of yourself ? Could you refer to yourself as a slave of Christ knowing full well, that implies (a) (b) (c) (1)

(2) THE PERSON THAT JAMES ACCLAIMS

For did you notice what he said, “ *A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.* ” (1:1) You see, having as it were lowered himself in the eyes of his readers and made quite certain as far as he was concerned all he could claim was to be a bond-slave, he then exalts the person of His Saviour. Look at:

(a) THE DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S SON:

Do you see how high James lifts His Saviour ? “ *A servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ,* ” my there was a when he had no believed on Him at all, he would have been included in that statement in (Jn 7:5)

“ *neither did his brethren believe in Him,* ”

(Mk 3:31-35) Later, however had come that glorious day when he had met with Christ after His Resurrection.

(1 Cor 15:7) This convinced James that Jesus Christ truly was the Saviour, and now he

describes him and the words of our text could be translated like this, “*Jesus Christ, who is God and Lord.*” notice carefully that James describes Him as:

1. The SOVEREIGN ONE:

“*Lord,*” he was more than a brother to James, he was His Lord. The One who has the right to reign and rule in the hearts of His people.

2. The SAVING ONE:

“*Jesus,*” the word means “*Saviour,*” and sums up His purpose in coming into this world. (Matt 1:21) 1:2:

3. THE SUFFICIENT ONE:

“*Christ,*” the Anointed One, the long awaited Messiah, the Christ. Now let me pause for a moment, do you see how James describes Him ? There’s a tendency in our day just to refer to Him as “*Jesus,*” but James gives Him His title and so should we, “*the Lord Jesus Christ,*” indeed the Master Himself said, “*Ye call me Master and Lord and ye say well.*” (Jn 13:13) (a)

(b) THE DESIRE OF GOD’S SERVANT:

For it was the desire of James’s heart to uplift the Saviour. My we need to do this in:

1. Our WITNESS:

A young preacher was once given some advice by a mature Christian of many years experience. It was this,

“*Young man whenever you preach, be sure that you do two things, lift the Saviour high and lay the sinner low.*”

Is that how you preach ? Is that how you witness ? Do you say with Charles Wesley ?

***“ Happy if with my latest breath
I may but speak His name
Preach Him in life and cry in death,
Behold, behold the Lamb.”***

2. Our WORSHIP:

Of course, this comes first and not second. But so often our work and witness for God is powerless because our worship is so poor. *So much is done in the energy of our flesh rather than in the ecstasy of our faith.* The tragedy is that we get so tied up with our programme that we lose sight of the wonder and the glory that surrounds the living person of the Lord Jesus Christ. My there is a vast difference between reading the Scriptures each day to accumulate

knowledge, and coming into the presence of the Lord Jesus and worshipping Him for what He is.

Lift the Saviour high. Is that your desire ? Do you know what one of the great dangers of our day is ? The danger of forgetting that although Christ's death on our behalf gives us *liberty of access, it does not mean that we can looseness in our approach.*

My we do have “ *boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus,* ” (Heb 10:19) but lets make sure boldness does not become brashness. *Justification means that we are right with God, but it does not mean that we are equal with God.* Lift the Saviour high ! 1:2:

(3) THE PEOPLE THAT JAMES ADDRESSES

For he addresses his letter “ *to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad,* ” (1:1) Now who are these people ? Well, they were:

(a) A SAVED PEOPLE:

Do you see how James addresses them ? (1:2 2:1 2:7 5:7) Now 15 times he refers to them as “ *brethren,* ” which was a common epithet among the first century Jews. You see, James is Jewish in its content. The recipients of this book were Jewish believers who had been dispersed and were facing problems personally and in their church fellowship. There was the problem of trials, the problem of temptation, the problem of being partial, the problem of worldliness, the problem of the tongue. My are these not our problems ? Do we not have believers in our fellowship who are suffering ? Do we not talk one way but walk another ? What about our tongues ? Is worldliness not another problem ? *I tell you the matters that James deals with here are relevant to us today.* Yes, they were a saved people, but they instruction so that they could cope. Incidentally, are you saved ? Like James are you a servant of God or a slave of sin ? (a)

(b) A SCATTERED PEOPLE:

Did you notice those two expressions in (1:1) ? “ *The twelve tribes,* ” can only mean the people of Israel, the Jewish nation. (Matt 19:28 Acts 26:7 Rev 7:4) You see, James sent this letter to Christian Jews. The word “ *scattered,* ” here means “ *in the dispersion.,* ” and it was used to identify Jews living outside the land of Palestine. So James wrote his letter to Christian Jews scattered outside Palestine. He wrote to those who had been dispersed, to those who had to leave their homes, their jobs, their property. (Acts 8:1 11:19 12:1) In another sense, James was writing to us because all believers are in the dispersion. My we are living as exiles from our eternal heavenly home. Thus, this letter is for us also for behind the hand of James is the hand of God. (2 Tim 3:16) (b) My lets be quite sure of this. As Christians we should expect to meet with difficulties, trials, temptations, oppression and rejection.

Anyone preaching that once a person becomes a Christian, he has no more troubles in this world, or that the Christian life is easy and undemanding is preaching from an empty head and

a closed Bible.

Do you recall what Christ said, “ *If ye were of the world, the world would love his own, but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.* ” (Jn 15:19) Mythe pressures and the persuasions of the world are all around us. Expect trouble but learn to lean on the power of God, for did you notice that they were (a) (b) they were:

(c) A SUSTAINED PEOPLE:

For while they were “ *scattered abroad,* ” they were still “ *twelve tribes,* ” (1:1) a common N.T. title for Jews. But do you know what this speaks to me of ? *The preserving hand of God.* They may have been split apart by Satanic pressure but they were still held together by Divine power. My as the Lord’s people we may be oppressed, may be in trouble, perhaps we find the going hard, we’re in a minority at work, we’re thought ill of. It could be at this very time you’re being ridiculed and thought irrelevant by the world, but my you’re being sustained and held secure in His preserving hand.

Do you recall what the Saviour said concerning the security of His sheep ? “ *Neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand and no man is able to pluck out of My Father’s hand.* ” (Jn 10:28-29)

I don’t know what this incoming week will bring for you, you may have to face trials, difficulties, perplexities but you can do so in the confidence that “ *neither death, nor life nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate you from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* ” (Rom 8:38-39) My you have the preserving hand of God, the sustaining grace of God, the continuing presence of God in all of tomorrows problems. **Trust Him !**