

The Christian Messenger.

Bible Lessons for 1879.

SUNDAY, October 26th, 1879.—Faith and Works.—James ii. 14-26.

COMMIT TO MEMORY: Verses 14-18.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."—James ii. 26.

DAILY READINGS.—Monday, James i. Tuesday, James ii. Wednesday, James iii. Thursday, James iv. v. Friday, Matthew vi. Saturday, Matthew vii. Sunday, Joshua ii.

LESSON OUTLINE.—I. Faith without works. Vss. 14-20. II. Illustrated by Abraham. Vss. 21-24. III. Also by Rahab. Vss. 25, 26.

QUESTIONS.—AMONG whose brethren did James belong? Matt. xiii. 55. Over what council did he preside? Acts. xv. 13. Where was his Epistle probably written? When?

I. Vss. 14-20.—What is better than saying or professing good things? Why are so many men straight in belief and crooked in practice? What example of a mere theoretical, and consequently fruitless, faith does James give?

II. Vss. 21-24.—By what did James hold Abraham to be justified? Was it faith, or obedience, or both, that distinguished him? What was he called?

III. Vss. 25, 26.—How was Rahab also justified? In what other place is her faith honored? Heb. xi. 31.

How do faith and works co-operate? If a correct creed exhibits no practical godliness, what is to be said of it? Where does Paul teach as James does? Gal. v. 6. Where does James teach that acceptable works are the fruit and evidence of faith? James ii. 18.

The Epistle of James was doubtless written by the James who, after the death of James, the brother of John (Acts xii. 2), is mentioned as presiding over the Church at Jerusalem (Acts xii. 17; xv. 13-29; xxi. 18-25), and who is called by Paul the Lord's brother (See Gal. i. 19; Matt. xiii. 55.) His eminently holy character, in all things, is said to have won for him the honorable appellation of "the Just." Paul and James, notwithstanding seeming differences, were one—Paul opposing faith as the living source of good works, to the claims of a dead morality; James opposing genuine good works as the expression of living belief to the claims of a dead faith. As the brother of our Lord, many of his words imbibe the sentiments of the Sermon on the Mount. The Epistle was probably written at Jerusalem, somewhere about A. D. 45, before the decree of the council, held A. D. 50.

Here is: I. A dead Faith (vss. 14-20.) More than words are needed to prove one's faith. It must be accompanied by a true morality and active benevolence. The question is not, "Does faith save a man?" but, "Can such a faith, evidenced only by words, save him?"

Many talk about charity, who withhold their money. So, there is pious talk that is fruitless.

Fruitless faith is the faith of demons.—They believe the foundation doctrine, God's unity; and it adds to their misery, instead of saving them.

II. A living Faith (vss. 21-25.)—Abraham offered Isaac. (Gen. xxii.) Faith and works wrought together. Works completed his faith, by giving it exercise.

The absence of the spirit leaves the body dead, so the absence of works, as a result of faith, evidences a dead faith.

EXPOSITION.—I. Verses 14-20.—Verse 14.—What doth it profit, &c.—Works are the evidence; words the profession. By "works," James means genuine fruit—a growth from the tree; not foreign imitations or importations, tied to the branches by strings. Can faith save him? Can such a faith save him? That is, a mere lip faith, which has no working force in it?

Verses 15, 16.—If a brother or [a] sister.—James doubtless has in mind needy Christians. Depart in peace, etc. An illustration, not an example, of a profession of faith, without the energy of faith. The words were good, but hollow. To depart in peace was the very thing to be had, but to say the thing did not make or prove the thing—just as to say, I believe, neither makes nor proves the belief. What doth it profit. As in vs. 14: What the profit? What the profit to either party? It is

no relief to the needy, and no virtue in the speaker. Instead of good, it is evil. Such blessing is doubly cursed—to the bleaser and to the blessed—blasting the former, and stinging the latter.

Verse 17.—Even so, faith, etc.—One may give to a creed an assent which is honest, but not earnest—an admission of obligation may exist without a spirit of obedience. People are likely to accept the creed as a thing of course, and there stop. Such merely formal assent, however, cannot stand against the onsets and on-slaughts of the enemy. It is as powerless to save the creed as to save the man. James describes this faith as "alone," because it never has fruits with which it can be seen.

Verse 18.—Yea, a man may say.—More exactly: But some one will say. James has spoken against the man of a fruitless faith. Now he conceives of some one feeling and raising the objection that the position of James is as one-sided and faulty as that of the man of a dead faith. The latter's position is, "I have faith." The former's, "I have works." So it seems to the objector, and so he tersely puts it. One has faith, the other works. Why should either complain of the other? Each has his virtue, one as well as the other. Why is not virtue as good as the other? Why not? To this implied question James proceeds to give answer in his own name. Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. The meaning of the reply is: You assume that "works," in my meaning of the word, can exist without a true faith, and hence that there can be a true faith without true works in one man, and true works without a true faith in another. Just here is your mistake; for genuine, living works are the fruits, and so the valid proof of a genuine living faith; and where the one is, there must and will be the other. There may be a dead faith without such works; there may be dead works without such faith. But neither dead works nor a dead faith are of any use before God, and in the matter of salvation.

Verse 19.—Thou believest that there is one God.—A prime article of Hebrew faith, which distinguished the Hebrew nation from all surrounding nations, and on which therefore a Hebrew was very likely to pride himself, as imparting merit in the sight of that God. Thou dost well. The faith itself, as to its contents, is right. It is right as to the doctrine held. Hence James says "Thou dost well;" that is, thus far. The devils [demons] also believe and tremble. No Hebrew would doubt either the actual existence of demons, or the thorough-going wickedness of their works. But, says James, they hold as firmly as you that prime article of the creed. If mere faith does not save or help them, you also must have something besides such faith.

Verse 20.—But wilt thou know, etc.—The phrase "vain man," here, means a man whose doctrine is vain, or empty of truth. So important was the doctrine, that it might well be viewed as characterizing the man—making him, like itself, vain, empty of the saving truths and life of God.

II. Verses 21-26.—Verse 21.—Was not Abraham our father justified, etc.—Mark the use of the words, "our father"—a Hebrew speaking to Hebrews—of that which constituted Abraham the father of the elect, and for which all Hebrews alike proved their descent from him. For the narrative of the sacrifice of Isaac, see Gen. xxii. The offering is spoken of as though actually accomplished in outward fact, because Abraham proceeded so far as to make manifest that only God's interposition prevented. That Abraham was "justified," that is, approved as righteous, for this act, is shown in Gen. xxii. 16-18, where the promise is assured to him because he did the act.

Verse 22.—Sawest thou how faith wrought, etc.—Faith moved to action, and action confirmed faith. God's word of command, even though in seeming conflict with his word of promise, was heard and heeded.

Verse 23.—See Gen. xv. 6. Abraham believed God, etc. Abraham's belief was imputed to him for righteousness, because in this, his faith, he stood in such connection with God that he could, and did, receive that righteousness which Christ brought in for the lost, the pardon of sin in connection with the principle of life. It was as to nature the

very same union with God which the believer in Christ now has. It made character, which determines conduct."

Verse 24.—Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.—See the apparent contradiction between Paul's doctrine and these words. But Paul never commended a dead faith. He commended a living faith as against dead works, while James commends living works as against a dead faith.

Verse 25.—Was not Rahab, etc.—See Josh. ii; vi. 17, 22-25. It must be remembered that her treatment of the spies, and neither her harlotry, nor her lying, as of itself, is commended. If God could not commend a man without commending everything pertaining to that man, there would be no room for a commendation of any, save Jesus. It would seem needless to make this caution here if it so often overlooked. By oversight, or evil intent, a favorable mention of a man or woman by Scripture, is often used as though it were an endorsement of all the words, acts, and habits, of the person.

Verse 26.—For as the body without the spirit, etc.—"The spirit" is not here the breath of life, but the conscious, rational principle.

Everything has two sides; most things have many sides. The most dangerous errors are half-truths.

Paul and James are both right, presenting, as they do, complementary views of the same great truth, which, taken together like two stereoscopic pictures, give us the rounded completeness of doctrine and duty.

When James speaks of a "dead" faith, he does not mean to designate a particular kind of faith, but to declare its absence.

If we are united by faith to Christ, then Christ is in us; and if Christ is in us, he cannot be hid.

—Abridged from the Baptist Teacher.

SUNDAY, November 2nd, 1879.—The Perfect Pattern.—1 Peter ii. 19-25.

GOLDEN TEXT.—"Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth."—1 Peter ii. 22.

For the Teacher of the Primary Class.

Shew a watch what makes the hands point to the right time? When the hands move right, you know that there are certain wheels and springs inside, all working together to make the hands show the time, though you do not see them. Our spirit inside works our hands, etc., as long as we can move, we know there is a living spirit in us, and though we can see it, it shows itself outside by what our body does.

I can say, "I have faith." Can you see my faith? How do you know I have it?

Tell what faith made Abraham do, so that he was called the "friend of God." Jesus says, "Ye are my friends, if you believe what I say? No. "If you do whatsoever I command you." But, then, don't you see, if you did not believe him when he says this, you would not try to do his commands.

Answer to Scripture Enigma.

No. 42.

J O N A H
O M E G A
N E B A T
A G A T E
H A T E D.

ANSWERS TO CURIOUS QUESTIONS.

- 1. A little before Eve.
- 2. Just-ice.

Scripture Enigma.

No. 43.

- 1. What plagues were visited on Syria's princely man?
- 2. Who fought for Israel within the tribe of Dan?
- 3. What country traded with Tyre in spices, stones and gold?
- 4. What king of Israel was so brave and bold?
- 5. What Syrian fruit is used in making soap?
- 6. What Scriptural virtue is mentioned there with hope?
- 7. What citizen of Bethany was raised up from the dead?
- 8. What officer of Ahab gave one hundred prophets bread?
- 9. What woman saved the spies at Jericho?
- 10. What fearless prophet in the lion's den did go?

11. What king of Israel disobeyed the Lord, Then killed himself by falling on his sword? The initials form a title of Christ.

CURIOUS QUESTIONS.

- 3. Who slew seventy brothers upon one stone?
- 4. Who is the first man mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures (with the exception of Abel) whose father saw him depart this life?

Booths' Department.

A Railroad Car Scene.

[A correspondent of the Washington Capital thus writes of an incident on the Boston and Albany Railroad, not many weeks ago:]

I ran across what first struck me as a very singular genius on my way from Springfield to Boston. This was a stout, black-whiskered man who sat immediately in front of me, and who indulged, from time to time, in the most strange and unaccountable manoeuvres. Every now and then he would get up and hurry away to the narrow passage which leads to the door in these drawing-room cars, and when he thought himself secure from observation, would fall to laughing in the most violent manner, and continue the healthful exercise until he was as red in the face as a lobster.

As we neared Boston these demonstrations increased in violence, save that the stranger no longer ran away to laugh but kept his seat and chuckled to himself with his chin deep down in his shirt collar. But the changes that those portmanteaus underwent! He moved them here, there, everywhere: he put them behind him, in front of him, on each side of him. He was evidently getting ready to leave, but, as we were yet twenty-five miles from Boston, the idea of such early preparations was ridiculous. If we had entered the city then, the mystery would have remained unsolved, but the stranger at last became so much excited that he could keep his seat no longer. Some one must help him, and as I was the nearest he selected me. Suddenly turning, as if I had asked a question, he said, rocking himself to and fro in his chair, the meantime, and slapping his legs, and breathing hard. "Been gone three years!"

"Ah!" "Yes, been in Europe. Folks didn't expect me for six months yet, but I got through and started. I telegraphed them at last station; they've got it by this time." As he said this he rubbed his hands and changed the portmanteau on his left to the right, and the one on the right to the left again, "Got a wife said I. "Yes, and three children," he returned, and he got up and folded his overcoat anew, and hung it over the back of the seat. "You are pretty nervous over the matter, ain't you?" I said watching his fidgety movements. "Well, I should think so," he replied; "I hain't slept soundly for a week. And do you know," he went on, glancing around at the passengers and speaking in a lower tone, "I am almost certain this train will run off the track and break my neck before I get to Boston."

"Well, the fact is, I have had too much good luck for one man lately. The thing can't last; 'tain't natural that it should, you know. I've watched it. First it rains, then it shines, then it rains again. It rains so hard you think it's never going to stop; then it shines so bright you think it's always going to shine; and just as you're settled in either belief, you are knocked over by a change to show you know nothing about it."

"Well, according to this philosophy," said I, "you will continue to have sunshine because you are expecting a storm." "Its curious," he returned, "but the only thing which makes me think I will get through safe, is because I think I won't." "Well, that is curious," said I. "Lord, yes," he replied, "I'm a machinist—made a discovery—nobody believed in it; spent all my money trying to bring it out—mortgaged my home—all went. Everybody laughed at me—everybody but my wife—brave little woman—said she would work her fingers off before I should give it up. Went to England—no better there; came within an ace of jumping off London bridge. Went into a shop to earn money enough to come home with: there I met the man I wanted. To make a long story short, I've brought thirty thousand pounds home with me, and here I am." "Good for you!" I exclaimed. "Yes," said he;

"thirty thousand pounds; and the best of it is, she don't know anything about it. I've fooled her so often and disappointed her so much that I just concluded I would say nothing about this. When I got my money though, you better believe I struck a bee line for home." "And now you will make her happy," said I. "Happy!" he replied, "You don't know anything about it. She's worked like a dog while I have been gone, trying to support herself and the children decently. They paid her thirteen cents apiece for making coarse shirts; and that's the way she lived half the time. She'll come down there to the depot to meet me in a gingham dress, and a shawl a hundred years old, and she'll think herself dressed up. Oh, she won't have no clothes after this—oh, no, I guess not!" And with these words, which implied that his wife's wardrobe would soon rival Queen Victoria's, the stranger tore down the passage-way again, and getting in his old corner, where he thought himself out of sight, went through the strangest pantomime, laughing, putting his mouth into the drollest shapes, and then swinging himself back and forth in the limited space, as if he were "walking down Broadway" a full-rigged metropolitan belle. And so on till we rolled into the depot, and I placed myself on the other car, opposite the stranger, who with a portmanteau in each hand, had descended and was standing on the lowest step, ready to jump to platform. I looked from his face to the face of the people before us, but saw no sign of recognition. Suddenly he cried, "There they are," and laughed outright, but in a hysterical sort of a way, as he looked over the crowd. I followed his eyes and saw some distance back, as if crowded out and shouldered away by the well-dressed and elbowed through, a little woman in a faded dress and a well-worn hat with a face almost painful in its intense but hopeful expression, glancing rapidly from window to window as the coaches glided in. She had not seen the stranger; but a moment after she caught his eye, and in another instant he had jumped to the platform with his two portmanteaus; and making a hole in the crowd pushing one here and there, and running one of his bundles plump into the well-developed stomach of a venerable looking old gentleman in spectacles, he pushed toward the place where she was standing. I think I never saw a face assume so many different expressions in so short a time as did that of the little woman while her husband was on his way to her. She didn't look pretty. On the contrary, she looked very plain, but somehow I felt a big lump rise in my throat as I watched her. She was trying to laugh; but, God bless her, how completely she failed in the attempt! Her mouth got into the position but it never moved after that, save to draw down at the corners and quiver, while she blinked her eyes so fast that I suspect she only caught occasional glimpses of the broad-shouldered fellow who elbowed his way so rapidly towards her. And then as he drew close and dropped those everlasting portmanteaus, she just turned completely around, with her back towards him, and covered her face with her hands. And thus she was when the strong man gathered her up in his arms as if she had been a baby, and held her sobbing to his breast. There was enough gaping at them heaven knows, and I turned my eyes away a moment, and then I saw two boys in threadbare roundabouts standing near, wiping their red eyes, and noses on their little coat sleeves, and bursting out anew at every fresh demonstration on the part of their mother. When I looked at the stranger again he had his hat drawn down over his eyes; but his wife was looking up at him, and it seemed as if the pent-up tears of all those weary months of waiting were streaming through her eyelids.

A class in a village school was up for a recitation in spelling and defining. The teacher wrote the letters s-e-w on the blackboard, and asked the class how that word should be used. "To sew with a needle and thread," was the correct reply. So-w was the next variation and the answer was prompt, "To sow grain in the field." The teacher then wrote s-o, and asked what that so meant. The class hesitated. Then a small girl near the end of the class answered, "It's what we say when we want the old cow to stand still."