

## THE PEOPLE'S FRIEND

### JAMES 2 v 23

**And the scripture came true that said, "Abraham believed God, and because of his faith God accepted him as righteous". And so Abraham was called God's friend.**

Some of you may be familiar with the magazine 'The People's Friend'. Perhaps, depending on your age, you may be a regular reader. 'The People's Friend' is a British weekly magazine which was founded in 1869. You can buy it in a number of countries. Each issue contains at least six self-contained short stories and two serials, a craft project and various factual articles, one of which is a piece on a picturesque town somewhere in the British Isles.

The people's friend didn't begin with a magazine; it dates back to the time of Abraham; James 2 v 23. Why was Abraham, called God's friend? He was given this privileged status on the basis of his deep faith and practical obedience. It was as a result of active co-operation of faith and works in Abraham's life. This was demonstrated particularly in his obedience when God asked him to sacrifice his son Isaac. By doing this Abraham received God's approval. He received righteousness and was called God's friend. God 'credited' Abraham's faith in God's promise, to give him a natural son and many descendants, as 'righteousness'. The word 'credited' is a financial term; it means 'to put to one's account'. As a sinner, Abraham's spiritual bank account was empty. But he trusted God and God put 'righteousness' as a credit on his account. 'Righteousness' should be taken in a forensic or judicial sense, as meaning that God considered him as 'being right' before him. The Greek verb 'pleroo' translated 'fulfilled' means 'to fill' or 'fill up'. It can be used of fishing-nets. Abraham's faith and God's verdict of acquittal were 'filled up', i.e. given their ultimate significance, when Abraham 'perfected' his faith with works. James wants to emphasise that Abraham's faith was a vital, active faith and that God's verdict was reconfirmed on the basis of that activity. The initial declaration of righteousness on the basis of faith is given its ultimate meaning and validity through the final declaration of righteousness on the basis of a 'faith that works'. Eugene Peterson in *The Message* puts it; **"It's that mesh of believing and acting that got Abraham named 'God's friend'"**.

There's no greater privilege than to be called God's friend. God extends his friendship to each one of us. Isn't it incredible that the great, awesome, holy, almighty God of the universe, wants to have an intimate friendship with people as small, insignificant and weak as us? We tend to think of God being our friend. The well-known hymn that we love to sing says; "What a friend we have in Jesus". This is true, but James emphasises that Abraham was God's friend. This amazing fact isn't limited to a godly Jew, like Abraham, away back in ancient history. The gospel tells us that we can have faith in Christ which makes us friends of God.

Are you God's friend? Have you ever trusted God by faith? Have you been set right before God? Have you received the gift of righteousness from God? There are two types of faith.

**Firstly, there is Saving Faith.** No matter how much faith a person may have, if it is not directed at the right object, it will accomplish nothing. There are many sincere people who say they believe. "I am a believer"; but in what or in whom do they believe? We're not saved by faith in some vague idea about God or in some spiritual being presented by the New Age movement. We're saved by faith in Christ who puts us right before God.

**Secondly, there is Active Faith.** Saving faith leads to action; it produces a changed life. Faith is not intellectual contemplation of a theological argument or an emotional response to an evangelistic appeal; faith leads to obedience on the part of the will. Obedience isn't an isolated event; it permeates the whole of life. There is a saying; "**Faith is never so beautiful or obvious as when it has on its working clothes**". Faith and works are inextricably linked; faith expresses itself in works. There's no value in saying you are a Christian because of an act of faith if your life doesn't demonstrate it in practical ways. Faith must come first but it is then followed by good works; lending support to charities; helping people in need; giving generously to worthy causes. For example, aid to an earthquake disaster, bushfire or flood; comforting those who are bereaved, consoling lonely people on the street. We will be at our most beautiful when we are wearing our working clothes and getting our hands dirty.

Abraham was the friend of God. The gospel is that on the basis of their faith, God is the people's friend. On the basis of your faith God wants you, even you, to be his friend. Surely that is an offer of friendship you simply can't refuse.