

A Study of the Book of James

Sermon # 5

“What Kind of Faith Do You Have?”

James 2:14-26

In 1991 James Patterson and Peter Kim took on the task of surveying America and tabulating the results. The results were given in their book entitled *“The Day America Told the Truth.”* In the chapter dealing with America’s religious beliefs they stated that 90% percent of the people questioned said that they truly believed in God. Yet they also discovered that of those who said they believed in God - 50% had not been to church in at least three months and one out of three had not been in a service in a year. Something is wrong when what people say they believe does not affect the way they live. [James Patterson and Peter Kim. *The Day America Told The Truth.* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1991) pp. 199-200.] *Something is wrong with this kind of Faith!!!*

George Barna claims that in his surveys - four out of five Americans claim to be Christians. Yet what they say they believe has very little to do with how they live their lives. As a nation we are drowning in drugs, wallowing in pornography, the faith that the majority of Americans have does not affect the way they live. *Something is wrong with this kind of Faith!!!*

This is the very condition to which James was speaking – living as though God’s Word was merely advice and it is up to us to make our own decisions about right and wrong.

Where is the faith that many American say they adhere to. “Someone has said that *faith is like calories, you can’t see them, but you can see their results!*” [Charles Swindoll. *James: Practical and Authentic Living* (Fullerton, Calif.; Insight for Living, 1991). p. 83.] Real faith should be able to seen at work.

In chapter two of his letter James deals with the nature of real faith, in so doing he gives us the foundations of real faith. I would like to share those with you this morning.

First, Real Faith Is More Than Just an Intellectual Acceptance of the Facts of the Gospel. (2:14-17)

Some depend on the fact that they have intellectually accepted the facts of the Gospel as assurance that they are saved.

Yet it is interesting to consider that the Bible never tries to prove the existence of God. It very plainly states that the man who denies the existence of God is not in his right mind. The Psalmist said, “The fool has said in his heart, *“There is no God.”*” (Ps. 14:1)

Therefore the man who is content because he believes in the existence of God really has nothing to pride himself on. He has something commonly held by nearly all intelligent people.

In verse fourteen James says, “What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can faith save him?”

Some find the phrase, “*Can Faith Save Him*” confusing. But the literal translation would be, “*Can that Faith Save Him.*” The question that James wants to answer is not whether works without faith can save us, but whether a dead faith, one which produces no transformation, can save us.

What about the person who claims to believe the gospel but whose practice never matches his or her claims? How should we regard the spiritual state of some people who claim to be Christians but who never live like it? Are such people safe in their assurance of heaven, or are they simply the possessors of hellfire insurance sold by the Devil himself.

In verse fifteen and sixteen James draws a comparison, “If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, (16) and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace; be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?”

James illustrates his point with a simple story. A church member was starving from lack of food and cold because of inadequate clothing. Another member, well aware of the need, responded to the person with a heartfelt wish for his prosperity but without doing anything tangible. He wished God’s peace and wholeness upon his fellow believer with the expression for shalom in the first century church. What may have sounded spiritual was, in reality, pitiful. The whole world would agree that this man is a hypocrite and fraud, and we are ashamed and embarrassed that he professes to believe in Jesus – all of which is James’ intention.

Alexander MaClaren, the great expositional preacher of the past said, “The people who least live their creed are... the people who shout the loudest about them. The paralysis which affects the arm does not, in these cases, interfere with the tongue.” [Alexander Maclaren. Hebrews, Chaps. VII to End, Epistle of James in Espositions of Holy Scripture. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1944) p. 416]

James draws the conclusion in verse seventeen, “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.”

Faith that does not result in obedience to the word of God is without life. No man can come into contact with Christ and remain the same any more than a person can come in contact with a high voltage wire and remain the same. Paul says, “Therefore, if anyone *is* in Christ, *he is* a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (2 Cor. 5:17) Real faith regenerates. If it is not changing me into another, better version of myself my faith is at best defective and at worse it stone cold dead.

Real Faith Is More Than Just an Intellectual Acceptance of the Facts of the Gospel and

Secondly, Real Faith Is More Than Just An Emotional Experience (2:18-19)

“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. (19) You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!”

Some people think they have a pass to heaven just because they believe in the existence of God. James confounds this with the evidence that the Demon’s also believe in the existence of God. Think for a moment about what the Demon’s not only believe – but what they know from experience.

- o They believe in the existence of God
- o They believe in the deity of Christ.

“And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, “You are the Son of God.” (Mk. 3:11)

- o They believe in the Virgin Birth.
- o They believe in the Reality of Hell.

“And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss.”

(Luke 8:31)

- o They believe in the Resurrection of Christ.
- o They believe in the Coming Judgment.

The demons know there is a God, even demons know Jesus is who he said he is, that He is the son of God sent by the Father to save all those who believe in Him. The difference between demons and Christians is not knowledge, the difference is that Christians faithfully submit to the Lordship of Christ and become His followers.

Not only do the Demons believe but James says, “The devils also believe - and tremble.” The text says that the demons “believe and tremble.” The word translated “tremble” literally means “to bristle,” have you ever be frightened enough to have the hair on the back of your neck stand up, well that the sensation that demons have when they think about Jesus. Yet it is not enough to know the facts of the Gospel, neither is it enough to tremble at the thought of judgment.

James declares that these demons believe in the same manner as the man who says he believes that there is a god, but is not godly.

Real Faith Is More Than An Emotional Experience Alone and...

Third, Real Faith Produces Change (2:20-26)

In verse twenty James describes true faith. “But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?”

First, real faith is based on the Word of God. In Romans 10:17 the Apostle Paul says, “So then faith *comes* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

Secondly, real faith involves the whole person: intellect, emotion and will. It is not just an intellectual agreement with the facts nor is merely an emotional response but also involves our will.

Third, because it involves our will, real faith always leads to action. For faith to be real there must be a response to the Word.

Jesus illustrates this principle by the use of two well-known Biblical persons, Abraham and Rahab (vv. 21-26). You could not have found two more different persons. Abraham was a Jew, Rahab was a Gentile. Abraham was a godly man, Rahab was a sinful woman. Abraham was the friend of God, while Rahab belonged to the enemies of God. What did they have in common? Both exercised saving faith in God.

Abraham's faith is seen in (vv. 21-24). "Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? (22) Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? (23) And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. (24) You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only"

We need to make a distinction between "justification" as Paul uses the word and justification as James uses the word. At first glance it would seem that there is a conflict between what these two biblical writers are tells us about the nature of justification. Paul says in Romans 3:28 that, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law." This seems in direct opposition with what James says when he says, "You see then that a man is justified by works and not by faith only" in verse 24. Paul is describing how man is justified before God, by faith alone. James telling us how man is justified before man, because man cannot see the heart his is justified by what he does, in other words by works. It was Abraham's works that demonstrated his salvation to others. Abraham was first justified before God by faith (Gen 15:5-6) and later justified before men by his works (Gen 22).

Rahab's faith is described in (vv. 25-26). "Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she had received the messengers and sent them out another way? (26) For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."

Rahab was a resident of the city of Jericho. Her story is told in Joshua chapters two and six. When the Joshua sent two spies into city to get the lay of the land, there they meet Rahab who protected them and in so doing confirmed that she believed in what God said and what God was doing. Rahab heard the word and believed. Rahab responded with her mind and her emotions but also with her will, she did something about it. She risked her life to protect the spies from Israel. Her mind recognized the truth, her heart was stirred by the truth and her will acted upon that truth. She proved her faith by her works.

In the case of both Abraham and Rahab they vindicated their claims to believe in God by the conduct of their lives.

If what we claim as faith does not lead to obedience, it is dead, empty, fruitless and will not save!

Conclusion

You believe that Christ is the Lord of Your life. Good!! But what do you do that you would not do if you did not believe it? You believe that Christ came to save sinners. That's wonderful. But what effect does that have on your actions? You believe in the coming judgment, from what sin does that restrain you? You believe you are saved. But be honest enough to ask yourself what difference it would make in your conduct if you did not believe.