

Sunday Morning Message

November 14, 2021

Putting Your Faith to Work – Study of The General Epistle of James

A Faith That Does Not Work Is Not a Living Faith

Text – James 2:14 - 26

Congregational Reading – James 2:14 - 26

Introduction

We have been taking our time going through this General Epistle of James, which was the earliest New Testament writing, written at the time to a predominantly Jewish Church; but through the Holy Spirit of God's inspiration, also intended for a much broader audience – Jew and Gentile alike - and also designed to be applicable for many generations to come, including the time that we are in right now.

We learned in chapter one that we can victory over temptation through the wisdom that God gives liberally to those who ask. We also saw in that first chapter that God's word is like a mirror that will reveal things to us that need to be corrected in our lives. James explained that we need to be doers of the Word on just hearers only.

The last two verses of chapter one revealed three tests that the Bible lists for people who truly belong to God. For people who have real religion, not just people who have go through some sort of external rituals or ceremonies. James is talking about people who really know God, and whose lives are truly being influenced by the Word of God:

"(26) If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain. (27) Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world." (James 1:26-27)

Basically what James was saying is that true religion, which comes from a real relationship with Jesus Christ will impact your life in three ways:

1. It will cause you to control your tongue.
2. It will cause you to care about those who are less fortunate than yourself.
3. It will cause you to live a separated life.

Then, in the first thirteen verses of chapter two, James taught us about partiality when it comes to people. That study was very practical for the divided nation that we live in today. James tells us that we need to treat all people the same and be prejudiced against anyone, or show favoritism to people because of how much money they have.

Transition

In the remainder of chapter two, James will deliver the key passage of the letter. These thirteen verses represent the theme of this Book of the Bible: *Faith Without Works is Dead*. Or, we could say that a Faith that does not work is not a living faith: it is simply not a real faith. True saving faith will change who we are and what we do. Faith will work out of us and work through us. John Calvin said: "Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone."

I. Some People are Mere Professors of Saving Faith (vs. 14 – 17)

The word profit (ὄφελος – *ophelos*) is translated *advantage* in 1 Corinthians 15:32. It means to benefit in some way. James is basically stating that a faith that is not accompanied by works does not benefit anybody and is in fact, good for nothing and profitable for no one. Real faith, genuine faith, saving faith, will be beneficial in visible and practical ways.

"Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." (2 Corinthians 5:17)

A faith that does not eventually do something does not benefit anybody, and it does not demonstrate Christ to the world around you. Our lives should be pictures of Christ. We are supposed to be shining the light of Christ to the people who come in contact with us. We do that through living out our faith.

II. Most People are Possessors of a Pseudo Faith (vs. 18 – 20)

A pseudo faith is a faith that is not real faith; it is not saving faith. It is in the head only and not in the heart. It has been referred to as an intellectual assent, or a head knowledge. Most people claim to believe in God, but they are not saved. They believe with their heads. They agree that God exists. Satan believes in God, but he is not saved. The devils that followed Satan also believe in God, but they are not saved.

Illustrations – chair – you do not place your faith in the chair until you sit in it; a plane – You do not place your faith in the pilot or the plane until you board the plane.

Many people believe intellectually that God and even Jesus Christ existed. They know things about God, but they are not depending on Him to save them. Saving faith is when you are trusting Jesus alone to save you. You are not just believing that He lived; you are trusting Him to save you and take you to Heaven when you die.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

The Book of Hebrews defines what faith is and illustrates what real faith will do:

"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (Hebrews 11:1-6)

III. A Few People are Pictures of Sincere Faith (vs. 21 – 26)

That chapter in Hebrews that we just read from has been referred to as the Hall of Faith. It lists several people who demonstrated their faith through the things that they did in life.

Read Hebrews 11:7 – 19

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of

whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." (Hebrews 11:7-19)

A. Abraham (vs. 21 – 24)

James also lists Abraham as an example of sincere saving faith. The story that he is referring to is from Genesis 22:1 - 14

Notice that James states that Abraham was justified by works (v. 21). A few have taken this as a contradiction of what was stated by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Romans:

"What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God. For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." (Romans 4:1-8)

Also in Paul's Letter to the Galatians He said:

"Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Galatians 3:6)

Paul was not saying that a man who possesses faith should not work. He was saying that trying to work your way into Heaven is impossible. You have the cart before the horse. Paul taught that you need to first place your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting Him alone to save you, and then God's Holy Spirit will enter into you and will change your life from the inside out. He will then begin to work through you. The works are an evidence of a faith that already exists.

"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Ephesians 2:8-10)

James has no disagreement with Paul. They both believe that faith alone is what saves, but also that real faith will always be followed by a changed life that produces works.

B. Rahab (v. 25)

Rahab is another picture of sincere and saving faith. This story is from Joshua chapters 2 and 6. Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who lived in the city of Jericho, which was the first city that was to be destroyed by the Israelites as they entered into and took possession of their promised land. Joshua sent spies into Jericho on a little reconnaissance mission to get the lay of the land. Rahab lived in a house that was located on the exterior wall of the city, and she demonstrated her faith in God by helping the spies and hiding them so that the men of the city would not capture them.

Rahab believed that the God of Israel was the only true God, and she placed her faith in Him and demonstrated that faith by helping God's people. Notice what she said.

"And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath. Now therefore, I pray you, swear unto me by the LORD, since I have shewed you kindness, that ye will also shew kindness unto my father's house, and give me a true token: And that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren, and my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death. And the men answered her, Our life for yours, if ye utter not this our business. And it shall be, when the LORD hath given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with thee." (Joshua 2:9-14)

Conclusion (v. 26)

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (James 2:26)

The spirit of man – the breath of man gives life to the human body. The Spirit of God gives real spiritual life to the believer. And if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature because of the indwelling Spirit of God. Real faith in God will result in a real change in life, which will result in good works that come out of you.

Do you possess real faith, a living faith; a faith that works and impacts the world around you?