

Sunday School Lesson August 16, 2020

Good morning, I hope you are well and blessed.

Lesson for August 16, 2020, "Faith without Works Is Dead"

Background Scripture is from James 2:14-26.

In the second portion of chapter 2 of James, James' is teaching that he can't understand why the believers are showing favoritism in the church; treating rich visitors with great respect and treating poor visitors with no respect. It was the rich who persecuted them and ridiculed their Savior. James exhorts them to obey the "royal law" ("Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"), in the Scriptures. If they offend in one point, they are guilty of all; they break this law, they break all the laws; and to show no mercy is to receive no mercy. True freedom is to obey God and do what pleases Him.

From the lesson text, "A word About Works, Martin Luther, author of the Protestant Reformation, did not care much for the letter from James. He thought the author's themes contradicted the tradition of Paul's teaching, and he particularly objected to the idea that Christians could be saved by anything other than faith."

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well, but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead. Someone might say, You have faith and I have works." Demonstrate your faith to me without works, and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works". (James 2:14-18)

This scripture must have posed quite a problem for Martin Luther. Luther, referred to the Book of James as an "epistle of straw" and sought unsuccessfully to have the entire book removed from sacred Scripture. Why? Because it didn't agree with his newly-reasoned idea of "faith without works." Luther said, "I think highly of the epistle of James, and regard it as valuable although it was rejected in early days. It does not expound human doctrines, but lays much emphasis on God's law. ... I do not hold it to be of apostolic authorship."

After his break from the Catholic Faith, Martin Luther taught, that the only way to respond to God's plan of salvation for all mankind is to simply trust in

his perfect love. Under that theology, doing "good works" or obedience to God was not necessary for salvation.

James knew that people needed to see the church displaying tangible evidence of what they say they believe, especially when it comes down to how we treat one another. Jesus, along with many others in the Bible, let their works speak for them and, how they worked showed what the real measure of their concern and faith was on the inside.

Three translations of James 2:14 as James starts speaking of, "Faith and Deeds":

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?" (NIV)

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? (NKJV)

Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it? (Message)

The section of verses dealing with faith and deeds, picks up right where James left off his teaching against having respect of persons and dealing with how we treat people.

James is questioning the validity of someone's faith without works, without evidence. He said, "What does it profit you? What does it profit for others around you? Consider this, for a man or woman to say they have faith or are in the faith without evidence to back it up is like saying, one is a doctor without a degree to prove it. When you go into a doctor's office, do you read the accreditations on the wall? This is proof that they can take care of you. What you see, accreditations on the wall, is speaking up on behalf of the individual to whom you are submitting yourself for care. The papers hanging on the walls are, personal testimonies. Faith that is worked out operates in the same manner. Faith is not silent. Faith is full of action. Faith is alive. Faith is shared through works to testify of its genuineness and sincerity. If it is lived out in the lives of the men and women of God, it can help move hearts toward salvation.

When one is living a life of faith, people should be able to look at their life, their actions, as signs of accreditation that we belong to God. They should be able to tell by how we operate and carry ourselves through our display of service, that we live what we talk.

Where is the profit if there is no proof? What can you and I show to a hurting world that we have their best interest in mind; that we genuinely care about them as a person?

James digs, deeper into someone faith by asking a question in verses 15 and 16, "Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes, and daily food. If one of you say to him, go I wish you well, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?"

Words without supplying to the physical, emotional, or spiritual comfort and support of another in distress, are what these two verses speak of. How many times have we heard or spoken of what should be done to help others without putting in some work to help society move toward that goal? Unless we move past the act of just talking, and show that we care through the act of doing; unless we put some backbone and muscle behind our mouths, the world will never see the true love of Jesus Christ in action.

Isn't this what it is all about? Going beyond the church walls to work at meeting the needs of the communities that we are in, to put the love of Christ on display through our actions and not just our words. We know that, some people, churches, and communities can do more than others. That is not what James is after here. He just wants us to get up, move past complacency, and just do something. James saw no positive effect for others in just words alone. Speaking "peace" without lifting a finger to physically help satisfy the present need, to him it was not true faith. True faith believes and then allows that belief to be put to work. True faith has heavenly aspirations that work out to show good on earth. James asked, "What does it profit" without it? What is each of us doing now that is benefiting his fellow man and the kingdom of heaven?

One pastor illustrated and applied James' verses 15-16 this way, "Look, one of your Christian brothers or sisters is without clothes and is starving. You learn of their need, and so you go to them and say, "I believe God can supply for all your needs. I will pray for you. I have faith that God can give you clothes and fill your belly, how did that help them or you?" Jesus didn't say, "If you see someone who is thirsty and tell them you believe, God can quench their thirst" then that is good enough.

Jesus said that if you give a cup of cold water in His name, you will not lose your reward in heaven (Matthew 10:42). James says the same thing here. He says that when you are standing before Christ in heaven, and He asks you how you have helped those who were in need, it is not going to be a satisfactory answer to say, "I had faith that God could help them. I believed

that God would take care of their needs." Jesus will say, "You should have helped them. You should have met their needs." On that day, all the faith in the world will not be profitable. You need works. On that day, faith will be useless. This is what we read in James 2:17-18.

We cannot earn our salvation by serving and obeying God, but such actions show that our commitment to God is real. Deeds of loving service are not a substitute for, but rather a verification of our faith in Christ. At first glance, James 2:18, which says, "But someone will say, you have faith; I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do". This verse seems to contradict Romans 3:28, "man is justified by faith apart from observing the law." But, deeper investigation; however, shows that the teaching of James and Paul's are not at odds. While it is true that our good deeds can never earn salvation, true faith always results in a changed life and good deeds.

James 2:19-20 "You believe that there is one God; Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?"

One's claim to faith goes beyond just believing in the very real fact that there is a one and only true living God. It is living out that belief in one's daily life. It's working His works. James opened our perspective this way by saying that's good; that's a start, that's right, "thou doest well" to believe. He goes on to say, "The devils also believe, and tremble," but they're still "devils." They know there is a God. They believe He exists, but they are not bowing their selves to working His works. They are not obeying Him. They are not working His will. They are not in a relationship with God; rather, they work against everything God is, love, and stands for.

If faith is meant to be alive and active and shown to the world through works, then "faith without works is dead." The one who claims they believe without any evidence to support that proclamation is vain, useless, hollow, in other words, no good.

From the text section – Receipts. "James includes two references to Hebrew Scripture in the passage, arguing that Abraham (in Genesis 15 and 22) and Rahab (Joshua 2) exemplify the kind of faith-seen-in-works he promotes. Perhaps James meant to have his readers know that works of faith will not always be neat and tidy. We may be called to risk our own safety or the safety of those we love. Certainly James, the bother of Jesus, and the others leaders of the early church did just that. The risk may be to our bodies, but it may also be to our reputations, our social positions, or our expectations of success. These actions and others like them demonstrate our trust in God

and meet James's definition of works. James is not looking for a change of heart or a new mindset; he wants receipts for what we have done."

In verses 21-24, James says that Abraham was considered righteous for what he did. Paul says he was justified because he believed God. James and Paul are not contradicting but complementing each other.

"You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." James was calling his readers to put their faith on display. To show they had a lively faith. To show the world that you are not just all talk, but the love of Christ is in you and manifesting through you to touch a world in need.

The Apostle Paul put it like this, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1). In the chapter before, he left off saying, "For I am not seeking my own good, but the good of many, so that they may be saved." (1 Corinthians 10:33).

While works cannot save us, they show that we are saved, they are telling proof that we are "justified" and moving in the same direction as our Christ. We can, in fact, profit others (compare to Paul's statement above from 1 Corinthians 10:33 regarding what he was doing was for the "profit of many" and James was asking in the verses of James 2:14-16), about what does it profit when the works are missing from the faith).

James 2:25 "In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteousness for what she did, when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?"

Rahab could have lost her life if she had been found helping the enemy of her people. But she heard, about all God had done in delivering His people against their enemies (Joshua 2:10) and it made the people of Jericho's hearts melt (Joshua 2:11). She said, "I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us," (Joshua 2:9). Not only did she express belief in all that God has done and was still doing, but she also went as far as to take these men in her home and personally sought for their care and safety. Her faith was put into action. Their lives were spared in the fall of Jericho because of her active, working faith which landed her in the hall of fame of faith (Hebrews 11:31).

James 2:26 "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." The body is a physical shell, so to speak, that houses the spirit. At the time of death, the spirit departs and goes back to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7) leaving behind the lifeless shell that remains. When we

attend funerals and view our dearly departed all we see is what is left, the outer person, the shell. "So faith without works is dead also." Faith, without the outward workings of tangible evidence, is just as dead as a body without a spirit. Life is not represented there.

Our actions testify to the faith that we say we have in us. What we do or how we live out our faith matters. Jesus taught, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brother of mine, you did for me." (Matthew 25:40)

From the text section, "Stepping into the world – How do we know what to do so, that our works will show our faith? Lots of congregations write checks, but the most life-changing faith expressions come through hands-on action. The kind of works that do the most good in the world, grow out of our genuine concerns for the people around us and employ the gifts God has given us. Community organizing can provide a framework for discerning and acting on needs outside the church. The components of organizing are straight forward: people take the time to assess needs in the community, find their mutual interest, not available gifts and talents, include people who have influence, plan the actions they will take, and finally debrief with those involved. Everyone has a chance to offer feedback and learn from what went well and what did not. In our collective effort, we can show our faith by our works."

We should remember, we are not saved by works: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast," (Ephesians 2:8-9). Works give proof to the faith living on the inside of you: "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone," (James 2:17).

Closing: For the love that casts out fear, the faith that sustains and the hope that never perishes, be with us now and forever more. Amen. God watch over us and take care of us.

Next week's lesson August 23, 2020, "Taming the Tongue" Background Scripture is from James 3:1-12.

Sources for this lesson: The Bible, Sermons from Rev. Bob Utley, retired professor of Bible Interpretation, International Sunday School Lesson and Commentary, and The Present Word Adult Bible Lessons.

Sunday School Books for Fall Quarter are in the Church office. Lessons start September 6, 2020