

[1]
True Faith Walks the Talk
James 2:14-26
November 1, 2015, Jeff Germo

I want to start off with a couple of stories from previous ministry experiences I've had. Many years ago I had a lady in my office who the day before I had witnessed throwing a temper tantrum. She had gotten mad at somebody and flipped out and said some things that were very demeaning to the other person. She was in her seventies and had been in the church all her life, and I wanted to talk to her about it. Her response saddened me deeply. She said, "That's just the way I am. I say it like it is. I've always been that way and I'm too old to change."

The reason her response was so disheartening for me was because she had resigned herself to remaining immature, which means she denied the power of Christ in her life.

At another church where I was the pastor, after I had finished preaching about growing in Christ, the worship leader, being moved by the sermon, decided to ask the congregation how it had impacted them. One lady spoke up very loudly and sardonically and said, "Pastor Jeff said three times that none of us are perfect. But the Bible tells us that we are." Talk about throwing a wet blanket on a group of people.

This was another person who had a reputation of being very angry. People were scared of her. She was very judgemental and critical because she had a wrong view of what it means to grow in Christ.

Don't get me wrong. We all, at times, blow it and do or say the wrong thing. We sometimes let our anger get the best of us. We are broken and don't always get it right. That is our lot on this side of heaven. And there are times when I look at myself and wonder how I could do, or say or think some things after having walked with Jesus for so many years. We all fall down from time to time.

But, as followers of Jesus we should be growing in the fruit of the Spirit. If we are truly following Jesus and living under his apprenticeship we should be growing more like him. Our capacity to love should be increasing. A year from now, I and others should be able to look at me and see a little more of Jesus.

Now, you contrast the two stories I just told with some other people I know. Some are here at this church. They had a bad start in life, and some of them had horrific childhoods, and yet, for some reason, they have learned to walk with Jesus, and learn from him and become gentle, loving people. We have a whole group of people in our Growth Group like that who are learning to love like Jesus. They inspire me to rise above my insecurities and live and love better.

What is it that keeps some people stuck? What is it that keeps them from getting rid of some of the ways of the old nature? Why is it that there are some people who have called themselves believers for decades and still seem to carry bitterness, resentment & anger with them? And they seem to have a negative, toxic vibe that oozes off them and infects others. I don't think there is anything that saddens me more than this. And I would imagine it grieves the heart of God as well.

It's important that we don't step into the realm of thinking we can judge the state of a person's heart, but when I see people who call themselves Christians habitually act in these ways it makes me wonder if they have really met Jesus, because when you meet Jesus he changes your heart.

Now, there may be other reasons for this kind of blockage in a person's spiritual growth, but I want to give you one reason this sometimes happens. We have rightly learned, in the Baptist church, and in many other evangelical churches, that when we receive the forgiveness of God based on Jesus paying the penalty for our sins, we receive the righteousness of Christ. That is very true. So, when God looks at those he has forgiven he doesn't hold their sins against them. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to them.

Paul says that in Romans 3:21-28; Romans 8:1-4; Ephesians 2:8-9, and that truth is peppered all the way through the New Testament. I wish we had time to look at all those passages, but unfortunately, we don't this morning. I would suggest that you do that when you get home though, or in your Growth Groups.

Paul clearly says in those passages that we are not justified, or made right with God, or saved, by our works, or by anything we do. Our salvation is a gift from God.

We have rightly celebrated this truth in the Evangelical church. It is one of the foundations of our faith, and we should shout it from the housetops. The righteousness of Christ has been imputed to us, so when God looks at us he doesn't see our sin, but instead, he sees Christ's righteousness in us. We have been made positionally perfect in Christ if we trust in his death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins. That is our standing with God because of Christ. And I am so thankful for this because none of us would stand a chance facing a holy God if he did not do this for us. Let's take a look at what Paul says in Ephesians.

[2]

Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV)

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

This is amazing and a huge relief, because, I think at a very heart level, we know we do not have what it takes. The problem comes when we believe that this is the end, when we get stuck here, at our justification.

And we forget to read the very next verse in Ephesians 2, where Paul tells us why God created us and saved us by His grace through our faith.

[3]

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Our good works **do not** save us. That is clear from scripture. Our efforts at godliness do not earn us a right standing with God and a place in heaven. We know this truth from the Bible.

[4]

But, friends, we have been saved **by** grace, **through** faith **for** good works and godliness. That's what the Apostle Paul said.

So, when we gather together Sunday mornings and in our Growth Groups, **what is our purpose?** The writer of Hebrews says in 10:24-25 that we are to stir each other up to increase our capacity to love and to do good works. That is God's call on our lives **so that** others would see Jesus in us.

Now before we take a look at what James has to say about this, let's see what Jesus has to say.

I think one of my most favourite parables from my childhood was the parable of the wise and foolish builders. In my first sermon at CRBC I preached about this.

Remember the Sunday School song we sang as children? ***The wise man built his house upon the rock,... The rains came down and the floods came up,... And the house on the rock stood firm.... The foolish man built his house upon the sand,... The rains came down and the floods came up,... And the house on the sand went SPLAT!***

The last verse of this little children's song gives the answer to this great life problem we have. It's simple.

So build your house on the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Blessings will come down.

I can remember being asked as a child who the wise man represented in this parable and the answer was always, "the person whose life is built on Jesus." That's what the song says.

That's great, but what does that really mean, and is that in fact what Jesus said? Let's look.

[5]

Matthew 7:24-27 (ESV)

24 "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. 26 And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

Who does Jesus say is the wise man? The one who hears his words **and does them**. It's not the one who has the most biblical knowledge, or has their doctrine all figured out. It's not even the one who simply believes. It's the one who hears his words and does them.

[6]

The only difference between the wise and foolish guys in this parable of Jesus is the wise guy obeys the words of Jesus. Both of them hear Jesus. Only one obeys.

When Jesus commissioned his disciples what mission did he give them? (Matthew 28:19-20) To make disciples by teaching them to obey everything he commanded them to do. Jesus never gave the slightest impression in any of his teaching that following him meant blind faith, or intellectual assent without action. To follow Jesus always meant, and means, doing what he said

to do. True faith in Jesus will always lead to action. We are Jesus-followers, and by definition following means movement, action, obedience.

Sometimes I hear people talk about 'Christianity'. That word makes it sound like we follow a system of belief, as if it's just another religion like Islam, or Hinduism.

[7]

We do not follow a system of belief. We follow a living person, the God who created the heavens and the earth. We follow Jesus. And he wants to change the world through us as we follow him.

Jesus said in John 15 that he has called us to spend time with him so we will bear fruit, so others will see Jesus in us. That is why he has us here, in Campbell River, as the church. He does not have us here to fill our heads with more theological knowledge so we can feel good about ourselves and pat each other on the back.

So, now that we have established that both Jesus and Paul taught this let's take a look at what James has to say.

[8]

James 2:14-26 (ESV)

14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?

So, James asks a fundamental question here. Really, what he is asking is what does saving faith look like? If someone who professes to be a Christian claims they have faith because they believe certain Christian doctrines does that faith save them?

"I said the sinner's prayer when I was six years old. I asked Jesus to come into my heart. Does that mean I am saved?" Or, "I believe in Christianity."

Or, I profess everything in the Apostle's Creed, or the Nicene Creed, or CRBC's statement of faith. If I believe all of this does that make me a Christian? Does that faith save me? Well, maybe. Or, maybe not.

James goes on to answer this.

[9]

15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

His answer is unequivocally "No." You are not a Christian just because you say you believe certain doctrines or creeds. True faith does not take root with mere mental ascent. If a planted seed never takes root so it sends up a shoot how can you claim there is life?

[10]

True faith will always produce fruit. What kind of fruit? (love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control). True faith will always produce change. It will always produce good works. And if there is no fruit of righteousness,

James says that faith is dead. There is a blockage. Something is wrong. You need to sit down with Jesus and listen and allow him to change you.

James continues.

[11]

18 But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.”

In other words, “I’ve got all my doctrine memorized. I know Jesus died for my sins and he was raised on the third day. I know my Bible inside and out. I am more spiritual than you are.

What does it matter if I have works? Works are for those who are less scholarly, less spiritual. That’s ok for you, but I don’t need them.”

Well, he challenges this faulty line of reasoning.

Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

Show me faith without action. The answer is obvious. It cannot be done. True faith cannot be demonstrated apart from action. Anyone can profess faith. That’s easy to do. I could say that I’m an Olympic athlete. Anyone can say that, but it doesn’t make it true no matter how hard I believe it. And I could read every book ever written about becoming an Olympic athlete, and know all the technical ins and outs about how to become one, but if I don’t put in the work and train, my belief will not be proved by my actions. It’s all in my head.

Just before Jesus told the parable of the wise and foolish builders, he told his listeners to beware of false prophets. And he said you will know them by their fruit. Then he said,

[12]

Matthew 7:21 (ESV)

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

Immediately following this he told his parable of The Wise and Foolish Builders which he used to stick his probe in the hearts of his listeners who thought their theological prowess was enough. In other words, if someone is not growing in the fruit of the Spirit or growing in their capacity to love, chances are they are not really Jesus-followers. Be careful though, because we are not the judge. That is God’s job and the Trinity is not accepting resumés to take his place.

James continues,

[13]

James 2:19 (ESV)

19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!

Did you know that there is no created being who knows their theology better than Satan? He’s been around for a long time. He knows the Apostle’s Creed. He knows that Jesus is God, and that truth sends fear through him – but it does not save him. Why? Because he has not

embraced Jesus as Lord. If he had, things would be different. True faith produces godliness. True faith produces works of righteousness.

Satan knows his days are numbered, which is why he is working so hard against everything God is for. If Satan can keep people believing that true faith is just a dead belief in a doctrine he will win.

But, we know that's not true.

[14]

20 Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; 23 and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"— and he was called a friend of God.

So, what is James saying here? For those of you who are new to the faith, or don't have much biblical background, this will be confusing. We don't have time to go into it at length this morning so make sure you ask someone about this.

Is James actually saying here that Abraham was justified by works apart from faith? Absolutely not! In verse 22 he says that faith and works labor together simultaneously. Salvation begins with faith.

[15]

And if the seed of the gospel lands on a soft, tilled heart that is ready to obey it will take root and there will be action. Faith and works are inextricably linked. They cannot be separated.

22 You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works;

Because Abraham believed God, his faith was proved and completed by his actions. How can you know if someone has true faith unless there are works of righteousness that follow? The answer is obvious. You can't.

Now, here comes the most controversial verse in the whole letter.

[16]

24 You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

Now, if James said, "**A person is justified by works**" and stopped there we would have something to worry about, because that would contradict the rest of Scripture. But he didn't. He simply meant that if there are no works there is no faith. The two are inseparably linked.

He gives another example from the Old Testament.

[17]

25 And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?

Rahab believed God and her belief led to action. That is the essence of true faith. A true faith in God will always lead to obedience.

[18]

²⁶ For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

If there are no works accompanying faith, that faith is just dead wood. It means nothing.

Friends, because of Jesus' finished work on the cross two thousand years ago we have been justified. We have been made right with a holy God - past tense. It's a done deal. But, between the advents, Christ's first and second comings we've got some work to do. It's not so that we can earn our salvation, or our place in heaven. Our works, or the fruit God wants to produce in us, is a natural, or rather a supernatural, outworking of a faith that he is producing in us.

True faith in Christ that has taken root in our hearts will produce works of righteousness. We cooperate with the Holy Spirit who resides in us, as he brings us to spiritual maturity. And as we do that, like we have been saying for the last couple years, we will notice some changes taking place.

We will begin to listen to the voice of Jesus as he shows us how to change, and how to make right the wrongs we have done in the past. We will notice that we will gain a greater control of our tongues. We will have a desire to bless people by the things we say instead of curse them. And as Jesus said, we will even gain a desire to bless those who curse us, and to love our enemies because that's what our Heavenly Father does.

We will also notice that we will begin to see people how God sees them. We will look outside ourselves and to the needs of others, and as Jesus said, we will minister to the "least of these."

And finally, as we mature in Christ we will have an increasing desire to keep ourselves morally pure. These are all ways that God's Spirit will work in us as we cooperate with him in our daily lives.

One of my favourite passages in the Gospels ever since I was a child was the story of Zaccheaus's encounter with Jesus. Let's take a look at how Jesus related to him before we celebrate communion together.

[19]

Luke 19:1–10 (ESV)

¹ He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way.

[20]

⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner."

[21]

***⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.”⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham.
¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”***

“Today salvation has come to this house,...

Here’s the deal. Zacchaeus wasn’t saved because he knew certain truths about Jesus. He was saved because he met and embraced Jesus, and in so doing realized that the life he always wanted could only be found in by letting go of the things that weighed him down, and living the way of Jesus. His actions were born out of what Jesus did for him. That is what will happen when we have an encounter with Jesus. This is so important.

[22]

We do not follow a system of belief called ‘Christianity’. We do not follow a religion that was started 2000 years ago by a long haired radical named Jesus. We follow Jesus, a living person, the God who created the heavens and the earth, who loved us so much that he gave his life for us so we could have a relationship with a holy God. And when we embrace him like that he will change us little by little so we become the kinds of people who love to love others, thereby fulfilling the law of liberty as James said in the previous passage (2:12). And others will see Jesus in us and want to come along.



True Faith Walks the Talk
James 2:14-26
Week of November 1st, 2015

Objective of this study: To have a clearer understanding of how walking with Jesus will change our lives.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read Psalm 33:16-22 meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome (5 – 10 minutes)

Describe a change you were afraid of but ended up being beneficial.

Word(30-45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Break up into smaller groups and divide up the following passages to read. Discuss what each passage has to do with walking with Jesus, faith, works, growth, and maturity. Regroup and share your findings with the rest of the group. **a)** Luke 19:1-10; **b)** Matthew 7:15-27; **c)** John 15:1-17; **d)** Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 3:21-28; Romans 8:1-4.
3. Read James 2:14-26.
 1. There are several arguments James uses to make his point about the relationship between faith and works. What are they?
 2. How does each of them help make his point?

Sermon Quote: "If the seed of the gospel lands on a soft, tilled heart that is ready to obey it will take root and there will be action. Faith and works are inextricably linked. They cannot be separated."

Work (30-45 minutes)

1. Take the rest of the time and share how Jesus has changed your life. If you are in a larger group divided the group so everyone has a chance to share. Practice your listening skills. If you have not yet met Jesus feel free to just listen. Think about about this: What is it about Jesus or those who know him that is attractive to you?
2. Take time now to praise God for the work he has done in your heart. Pray that you would be open to the changes he wants to make in you so others would see Jesus and want to join you on your journey.