

## HOW TO HAVE REAL FAITH

Karl Barth was a famous theologian. He lived in Basel, Switzerland. One day he was on a streetcar. A tourist to the city climbed on and sat down next to him. The two men started chatting with each other. "Are you new to the city?" Barth inquired. "Yes," said the tourist. "Is there anything you would particularly like to see in this city?" asked Barth. "Yes," he said, "I'd love to meet the famous theologian, Karl Barth. Do you know him?" Barth replied, "Well as a matter of fact, I do. I give him a shave every morning." The tourist got off the streetcar quite delighted. He went back to his hotel thinking to himself, "what luck, today I met Karl Barth's barber."

You can know a lot about a person without actually knowing or even meeting them. In a large church you meet a lot of people. When I was in Kuwait it was a large church with many different congregations. I would be out shopping and someone would come up to me and start talking like they knew me. They seemed to know all about my family and my life. They 'knew' me but I didn't know them.

You can also know a lot about the truth without ever really accepting it and making it your own. You can know a lot about Christianity without ever having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Today we are continuing in our series looking at the book of James.

James 2:14-26 What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 18 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. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder. 20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness," and he was called God's friend. 24 You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

### 1. Faith is Not Just Something You Say

James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers, if a man *claims* to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him?

Just because you say that you are a Christian does not mean that you are one. There are a lot of people who claim to be Christians. Polls show that over 70% of Americans, when asked, identify themselves as Christians. However, less than 20% of Americans go to church regularly. There are lots of people who claim to be born again, but you do not see anything in their lifestyle. I have a brother and sister who both would claim to be Christians, even though they never go to church or have anything to do with Christ. It is more than just talk that is involved in real faith. Talk is cheap. Not everybody who is a professor of Christianity is a possessor of Christianity. Jesus said it this way;

Matthew 7:21 Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

James is saying that real faith is not just something you say. Do you know anybody that claims to be a Christian but you don't see any evidence in their life? That's a phony faith. Real faith is not just something you say.

It is said that Napoleon, while looking at some papers, let slip the bridle of his horse, which reared so that the Emperor was in danger. A corporal leaped forward and caught the bridle, bringing the horse under control. Napoleon saluted the corporal and said, "Thank you, Captain." "Of what company, Sire?" asked the corporal. "Of my guards," replied Napoleon. The young corporal picked up his musket, hurled it aside, and walked across the field toward the emperor's staff, tearing of his corporal stripes as he went. When he took his place among the officers, they asked him what he was doing. He replied that he was a captain of the guards. "By whose order?" queried one of them. "The emperor's order," he replied.

A man of less faith might have ignored Napoleon's words. He might have picked up his musket, stepped back into the ranks, and boasted for the rest of his life that Napoleon had called him a captain. "I am a captain!" he would boast, as he lived, ate and served the life of a corporal. This describes the difference between mental assent and true faith, which takes God at His word and acts upon it. Just because you claim to be a Christian does not mean that you are one.

## 2. Faith is Not Just Something You Feel

Being saved is more than just emotions. A lot of people confuse emotions and sentiment with faith. You can be emotionally moved and never act on it. You can go to church and get a quiver in your liver, but it never makes any difference.

James 2:15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?

What good is it if you see someone in need and you say, "I feel for you!" Faith is more than just words or feelings. If, after church, you're walking out to your car and you slip and fall, and then someone comes over to you and says, "Wow, that looked painful. I will pray for you that you get back on your feet!" -- is that any help?

Samuel Bradburn was a friend of John Wesley. He was highly respected by his friends and an effective preacher. On one occasion he was in desperate financial need. When Wesley learned of his circumstances, he sent him the following letter quoting Psalm 37:3 "Dear Sammy: 'trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.' Yours affectionately, John Wesley." Attached to the letter was a 5-pound note. Bradburn wrote back saying "Dear Sir: I have often been struck with the beauty of the passage of Scripture quoted in your letter, but I must confess that I have never seen such a useful 'expository note' on it before."

To profess faith in Christ as Savior and Lord but ignore the needs of fellow believers is inconsistent. Just feeling for the needs of people around you is not enough. James said that true faith translates into compassion in action. The best commentary on faith is actions.

Remember the story of the Good Samaritan. The priest and the Levite both saw the man. They saw his need, and probably in their own way felt sorry for him. However, they did nothing. It was only the Samaritan who saw him, took pity on him AND helped him.

Faith is more than just a feeling. You can come to church and be moved by the music and message, but if it does not result in a change in behaviour what good is it.

### 3. Faith is Not Just Something You Think

For some people, faith is an intellectual trip. It is something to be studied, debated, talked over and discussed.

James 2:18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."

James imagines here an intellectual objector who says, "You're into faith, I'm into works. That's cool. Different strokes for different folks. Let's debate it. You've got your thing, I've got mine. To each his own way."

When we lived in Kuwait, we were one of the only churches in the country. Because of that, from time-to-time Muslims would come and want to debate Christianity with me. They would come with all kinds of questions, not really seeking the truth, more to just try to convince me that their faith was better than mine. I would always come back to Jesus and talk about sin and guilt and they would always get uncomfortable and leave. They wanted to debate the truth, not live it.

Real faith is visible. You can see it, it is apparent. If you claim to be a Christian, people will be able to see the difference in your life. What is faith? Anybody can claim to have it. How do you know for sure? James says, "Show me." If you claim to be a Christian, I have a right to ask you to prove it by looking at your lifestyle. Somebody once said that, "Faith is like calories - you can't see them but you can sure see the results." You can't see faith but you should be able to see the results.

You can't see electricity, but if you grab a wire, you're going to know it. I don't see how somebody as big as God can enter your life and it not change you. James says, flat out, that if there is no change then you should question whether God is really in your life. What can I see in my life that proves it?

Matthew 7:17-20 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

Jimmy Carter in his book *Why Not the Best?* said that one of the things that was a turning point in his life when somebody asked him the question, "If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" That's a good question. That's what James was talking about. If you say, "I know it!" then show it! How do you know you're a believer? You'll see some changes in your life. Real faith always produces change. Real faith is not just something you say or feel or think.

A bus driver became annoyed with his job because he had to wait several minutes after every run near an open field which 'litterbugs' had made into an unofficial dump. He thought that somebody should do something about that unsightly mess. One day he himself decided to get out and pick up some of the tin cans and other debris which were lying all around. This improved things so much that he soon was eager to complete his route and spend all his free moments in cleaning up the area.

When spring came, he was so enthusiastic about this project that he decided to sow some flower seeds. By the end of the summer people were riding to the end of the line just to see what the driver had accomplished by doing what he and others had only talked about before." The article reminded me of the tremendous gap that often exists in many churches between preaching and practice! Many who know what they believe cause us to wonder if they really believe what they know! An intellectual awareness of the truth is not enough. Belief must take fruit in actions.

#### 4. Faith is Not Just Something you Believe

There are a lot of people who have strong beliefs in God, the Bible, about Christ. They can recite creeds to you and catechisms and talk about doctrines of the Trinity, quote bible verses. James says, "big deal!"

James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.

Just saying I believe in God is not enough to get you to heaven. Even the devil believes in God! The devil is a great theologian. He knows a lot more about the Bible than you do. He's been around a whole lot longer. He knows theology backwards and forwards.

The word BELIEVE in Greek means "to trust in, to cling to, to rely on, to commit yourself completely." I believe in Hitler but I'm not a Nazi. I'm a Christian because I believe in Jesus. But it's more than just a head knowledge. People say "I believe in God." James says, "Big deal. Everybody believes in God. How do you have a creation without a Creator? But that's not enough."

It is that kind of faith which would lead a man to take a bottle of medicine from his medicine cabinet. Looking at the instructions on it, he says, I'm sure they're correct. I have all confidence in the source of the medicine. I know who wrote these directions. I believe everything about it. I know this will relieve my headache, if I just take it." But he takes the medicine bottle and puts it back on the shelf. He doesn't lose his headache. It continues on. Yet he can say I believe that medicine. I believe all about that medicine. But still, he won't take it. That's dead faith. Faith without works is dead.

#### 5. Faith is Something you DO

In the next couple of verses James gives two illustrations that say real faith is something you do. Faith is active. It's not passive. It's a commitment.

You cannot go on being a good egg forever. You must either hatch or rot -- C.S. Lewis

James goes on to give two illustrations of two very different people, Abraham and Rahab -- exact opposite extremes. Abraham is a man. Rahab is a woman. Abraham is Jewish. Rahab is a Gentile. Abraham is a patriarch. Rahab is a prostitute. Abraham is a major character in the Bible. Rahab is a minor character. He uses these illustrations to say, it doesn't matter who you are as long as you've got the important thing. They only had one thing in common -- their faith in God. Their faith in God that led them to an action.

Our faith is not determined by what we do, it is demonstrated by what we do.

Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is never alone -- John Calvin

It is not what we eat but what we digest that makes us strong;  
not what we gain but what we save that make us rich;  
not what we read but what we remember that makes us learned;  
and not what we profess but what we practice that makes us Christians.

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, there should be life change. Your faith should be evident. That is one of reasons we exist as a church, to help people grow and mature in their faith. So, let me ask you a simple question. Do people see Jesus in you? If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?

An old Scotsman operated a little rowboat for transporting passengers across a small river. One day a passenger noticed that the good old man had carved on one oar the word "Faith" and on the other oar the word "Works." Curiosity led him to ask the meaning of these oars. The old man, being a well-balanced Christian and glad for the opportunity to testify said, "I will show you." Then he dropped one in oar called Works and rowed, and they just went around in circles. Then he dropped in the oar called Faith and rowed, and the little boat just went around in circles again - this time the other way around, but still in a circle. After this demonstration the old man picked up Faith and Works, and plying both oars together, sped swiftly over the water, explaining to his inquiring passenger. "You see, that is the way it is in the Christian life. Dead works without faith are useless, and faith without works is dead also, getting you nowhere. But faith and works pulling together make for safety, progress, and blessing."