**FAITH AND WORKS**

**April 29, 2015**

**Bramalea Baptist Church**

In the Introduction to the Book of James in my Inductive Study Bible it describes James’ epistle this way, *“an epistle that would show what the gospel is like when it is lived out in shoe leather.”* Today as we wrap up our series, LIVE IT LOUD, we’re going to look at, and be challenged by a passage from this very practical book of Scripture, and – I hope – rethink what it means to be people of faith.

**14What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? 15Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, 16and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?**

**17So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.**

**18Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”**

**19You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror. 20How foolish! Can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?**

**21Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. 23And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.” He was even called the friend of God. 24So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.**

**25Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road.26Just as the body is dead without breath, so also faith is dead without good works.**

**SAVING FAITH**

The first thing I want us to think about briefly this morning is ***saving faith***.

As we look at this passage, it would be easy to assume that James is teaching that both faith and works are required for salvation. **14What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don’t show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone?** In fact, there are those who use this very verse as well as verse 20 **“can’t you see that faith without good deeds is useless?”** to support the idea that faith + works = salvation. Is this in fact what James is saying? No.

How do we know this? The Bible is consistent it what it says, and we must look at this verse in context with what is taught regarding our salvation elsewhere in Scripture. Ephesians 2:8-10 is one of the clearest statements regarding our salvation. Paul writes to the Ephesian church, “**For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift from God - not by works, so that no one can boast.”** We are saved by God’s grace, through faith. The New Living Translation puts it this way, **God saved you by his special favour when you believed. And you can’t take credit for it, it is a gift from God.”** This is so important to note. For those of us here this morning who are believers, we enjoy salvation as a gift from God. A gift is something that is given to you. If you have to do something to earn a gift, it is no longer a gift.

Paul clearly states that our salvation is not by works, period.

So how do we reconcile this? We need to see that James and Paul both agree. They express things differently because they are addressing different audiences.

Paul is addressing people who were essentially trying to get to God through works. There were those who believed that in order to be saved, you had to have faith in Jesus Christ and adhere to the law. Paul writes a number of times to correct this notion. He was emphasizing that salvation was a gift of God’s grace, keeping the law would not get them to God. If it could, if doing good works could get us to God, there would be no need for Christ’s sacrifice.

James is writing to a group who called themselves Christians and claimed to have faith but whose lives showed no evidence of this. In fact, they did not possess the kind of faith that Paul writes about, a faith that shows itself often in godliness, in battling against sin, in loving others. James isn’t writing to say that faith and works are necessary for salvation. He is simply asking the asking the question, where is the evidence of your faith?

***Saving faith*** is faith that trusts in God alone for salvation. It is a faith that recognizes that salvation is a free gift from God, and there is nothing that we can do to earn our salvation.

**DEAD FAITH**

**15Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, 16and you say, “Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do?** **17So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless.** Dead and useless.

A light bulb without light. A traveller who doesn’t travel. A pump without water. These are great images from the video we saw earlier of ***dead faith***. Dead and useless faith.

Listen to this verse from Ephesians that follows immediately on the heels of Paul’s reminder that salvation is a gift from God. **“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”Eph. 2:10** This is completely in keeping with what James is saying. It is clear that there is an expectation that good works will flow out of faith. “**So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless**.”

Consider the response to the person in need, **“Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm and eat well”** or as the NIV puts it, “**Go in peace, keep warm and well fed.”** There is a pious undertone to this phrase. As spiritual as it may sound, it is actually ridiculous and offensive. There is no action taken whatsoever to provide for the needs of the other person. It is merely words.

Now, let’s look at this in a contemporary context. Consider something that we often offer in response, “I’ll be praying for you!” or “Don’t worry, God will provide.” Don’t get me wrong, it is a wonderful thing to pray for others and I believe that God does provide. But, when someone is looking to have a practical need met, simply telling them that you’ll pray for them isn’t enough. Telling them that God will provide isn’t enough. James reminds us that if there is a practical need that we can do something about, we should. **“For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”** If we don’t act our faith is dead.

One of the greatest challenges the church faces today is that many on the outside looking in see dead and useless faith. There was a time in history when the church was at the forefront in many areas of public life, building hospitals, places of higher education, orphanages. There was a time when the church was the place that people turned to in times of need. Over time, the church’s involvement in the betterment of society has waned, to the point that it is almost non-existent in some areas.

But Christ has chosen his church to be the agent of change in our world; that has not changed over the centuries. What has changed, is our attitude and our perspective. The Church to a degree has adopted an attitude that says, **"Go in peace; keep warm and well fed".**

What do you do when you are confronted by someone with a practical need? Do you seek to help meet that need? Or, do you respond with an, "I'll be praying for you”? ***Dead faith*** is faith that may sound spiritual, but is only words. And, sadly, there are many people in churches today whose faith would appear to be dead.

**LIVING FAITH**

James is writing – as I said earlier – to people who called themselves Christians, but whose lives did not show any evidence of having been changed.

Last week, Pastor Stephen spoke about the importance of spiritual fruit in our lives as evidence to the truth that we have been saved. In the same way, our deeds or actions are evidence of a ***living faith***.

James goes on to say this in verse eighteen, **18Now someone may argue, “Some people have faith; others have good deeds.” But I say, “How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”**

Ultimately what James is saying to us is that faith and deeds are true marks of a living faith; they are both indispensible in the life of a Christian. He is underlying once again that it is not simply enough to claim that you have faith, there must be evidence of that faith. Our faith is not dependent on our works, however works should flow out of our faith.

True faith in God will lead to action. This is the point that he was trying to drive home to the believers in this passage. Where faith exists there should be evidence of that faith. That our faith should lead to action should not be a point that is even up for debate. Why? If for no other reason than the example that God set for us.

The God that we put our faith in is a God of action. Listen to these verses from Ephesians. **As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” Eph. 2:1-5**

When we were dead in our sin, God acted. He didn’t simply offer some sympathetic words; he acted. We were dead in our sin. We needed a way to have our relationship with him restored. He provided for our need in the person of Jesus Christ. God acted and he calls us to do the same.

James, in essence, is throwing down the gauntlet here. **“How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds.”** So how will you respond? There are many simple ways we can give evidence of a living faith. If you know someone is in need of food, buy them groceries or invite them over for a meal. If someone is in need of clothing or shoes, buy them some or give them some of your own. If they’re having financial trouble because of a job loss or some other circumstance, help with a bill payment. Is someone you know unable to rake their lawn – rake it for them!

James’ challenge to us is that we take practical steps to help one another, letting good deeds flow out of our faith. This then provides evidence that our faith is not dead and useless, but alive. ***Living faith*** takes action; it will be marked by good deeds or works. Is there enough evidence in your life to convict you of having a living faith?

**MATURING FAITH**

Living faith leads to a ***mature faith***. As we exercise our faith, God causes it to grow and mature. Two things lead me to say this. First, look back at the opening of James with me, specifically James 1:2-4. **“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”**

When we were raising our kids, our desire was that – once they had reached adulthood – they would be able to be independent and be able to function well on their own. We were not raising children as it were; we were raising adults.

When we are born-again we are like spiritual infants. God’s desire for us is that we will grow through adolescence into spiritual adulthood. As James reminds us in these verses God desires that we would be **mature and complete.** We move to maturity when we face trials and testing and when our faith is exercised.

The second thing that allows me to say this is that James cites two examples of people who demonstrate living faith, but also whose faith is also seen as mature as a result of taking action.

Abraham, faced a most difficult test when God asked him to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham acted out of his faith in God and took Isaac to sacrifice him. This is what James says, **21Don’t you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. 23And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.”** The New American Standard Bible reads, **“his faith was made perfect.”** Abraham’s faith led him to action, to obedience to God. His faith and action working together led to growth, a maturing faith. What Abraham believed impacted his life, his whole life. This is a mark of maturing faith.

James also cites Rahab as having this type of faith. **25Rahab the prostitute is another example. She was shown to be right with God by her actions when she hid those messengers and sent them safely away by a different road.**You may recall the story of Rahab from the Old Testament. When spies were sent into the Promised Land to explore it and report back to Joshua, Rahab – although she was not an Israelite – hid the spies from her own people. Her faith caused her to take action. By her actions she identified herself with the Israelites putting herself in clear danger and she protected the spies.

What opportunities has God given you to step out in faith, to take action? You may never be called to a task so monumental as either of the two examples James cites here, but that’s not his point. James uses these examples to remind us that our faith in God calls us to act. ***Maturing faith*** grows and matures as it is acted upon.

**CONCLUSION**

There are important lessons to be learned here. Our salvation is a gift from God that we receive by faith. Our salvation is in no way dependent on our works. This is **saving faith.** We can say that we have faith; we can shout it from the mountaintops. But – if it is words only – it is **dead faith. Living faith** is evidenced by faith that takes action; it is marked by good deeds or works that flow out of our faith in obedience to God. And, finally, a **maturing faith** grows and matures as it is acted upon**.**

“**As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”**

Sobering words that we read at the end of this particular passage. It’s a challenging passage. James is writing not to condemn however, but to stir those who are believers to do good works, to encourage them to let their faith take action by helping to meet the very practical needs of those around them.

If you feel at all convicted by what he has written, that’s a good thing. It means that your heart is compassionate; it means that God can teach you and that you can change. There is room for growth in this area for each one of us. Where do you find yourself this morning?

As I began this morning I spoke about the reality that one of the greatest problems facing the church is that those on the outside looking in don’t see much evidence of the type of faith that James is speaking about. For that, the Church has no one to blame but herself.

We can’t change what happens in other churches, but we can move to ensure that this is not true of us. There is much that we do as a congregation that demonstrates that we desire to be people of action, ministries like the Stephen Ministry we heard about earlier for example. I also hear many stories of how people are blessing others in practical ways, just as James is calling us to do.

But there is room for growth for each one of us.

My prayer for myself, for you, for us is that we would be a church of action. A church that lives out its faith boldly in practical ways so that God will be glorified. So much so that when others look in, there would be more than enough evidence to say that we are a people with a living, vibrant faith.

Throughout this message, I don’t know if you have noticed the background of the slide, two gears in a mechanism. Imagine that one of these gears represents faith and the other, works. Notice the way the teeth of the gears intersect? As one gear moves, it turns the other. If one gear is not functioning properly, the other will not function either.

This is how it is with faith and works. They work together to give evidence of a living faith. Let’s make sure that, as a church, we have it in gear!