

Is Your Faith Any Good?

James 2:14-26

Introduction

The tightrope walker asked the crowd, “Do you believe that I can make it?” The crowd enthusiastically cheered, “Yes!” The tightrope walker then pointed to a man in the crowd and said, “Do you really believe I can make it across the waterfall?” The man said, “Yes sir, I believe you can make it.” The tightrope walker then pointed to a barrel that was near the starting point of the tightrope. He asked the man again, “Sir, do you believe that I can make it across the tightrope while balancing on that barrel?” The man with the crowd behind him, screamed with excitement, “Yes, we believe! We have faith that you can do it!” With great joy and a big smile, the tightrope walker looked at the crowd and thanked them. Then, without missing a beat, he asked the man from the crowd if we would come get in the barrel. The man from the crowd quickly lost his enthusiasm. He was not willing to get in the barrel. In fact, no one from crowd would get in barrel, even though just moment before, they all, in unison, declared that their faith in the tightrope walker.

As the tightrope walker revealed, the crowd had fickle, fair-weather “faith.” It was “faith” that was easy to profess when nothing was at stake, but when there was a personal cost associated with it, the people were not so sure. It was a faith without action. Or to put it another way, it was not really faith. It was performance. It was hysteria. It was not confidence. It was not certainty of what was hoped for or assurance of the unseen (Hebrews 11:1).

As we enter into this New Year, I want to urge us to not have the type of faith that this crowd demonstrated. I want us to demonstrate a living, active faith. A faith that trusts. A faith that acts. A faith that works. True faith, saving faith, is an active faith. For, as we will see in this morning’s passage, the only type of faith that is any good is a faith that compels people to action. To see this, I want to invite you to look with me at James 2:14-26...

Read James 2:14-26

Exposition

I. Good Faith reveals itself in action toward others. (Vv. 14-17)

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

As James wrote to his audience, he does not deny that faith saves, but rather, that it is certain type of faith that saves. That is, the type of faith that James has in mind is a “living faith,” an “active faith.” It is a faith that reveals itself in action toward others. It is a faith that obeys God’s Word because it truly believes God’s Word. Hence the example that James provides in verses 14-16: If we know that we believe what God’s Word says about meeting the needs of others, then we encounter someone who is in need, but instead of meeting their need, we send them away, James says it is evident that we do not really believe God’s Word.

Now, at this point, someone might ask, “Does this mean that faith does not reveal itself outwardly is not a true saving faith?” For example, other than his comment next to Jesus on the cross, the criminal who confessed His faith in Christ never demonstrated anything outward beyond his statement because he died. Was that man’s faith good? Or what about the person who confesses faith in Christ on their deathbed? Is such faith good? These are good questions.

Simply put, the examples of the thief on the cross and the sinner on their deathbed are not problems for what James is teaching in these verses. James point is not that faith always in every circumstance must immediately demonstrate or reveal itself in some outward action toward others in order for faith to be genuine. Instead, what James is getting at is that given the opportunity, in time, good faith will express itself outwardly. James was not dealing with thieves on crosses or sinners on their deathbed, but rather, he was dealing with people who claimed to have faith in Christ but who were living in a manner that was contrary to the faith that they claimed to possess.

Let me try to illustrate what I’m saying: Imagine you are planting a garden in your backyard. You till up the soil and plant the various types of seeds in the soil. Now, for most seeds, if you planted everything correctly, if you come back the next day, you will likely not see anything. The seed is still under the ground, taking root, preparing to burst forth at some point in the future. So, day after day, you check to see if anything has sprouted. But for some reason, week after week, month after month, you never see anything come to the surface. What were your conclusion be? Something is wrong, right? That seed was supposed to bear fruit, but there is no fruit. The most reasonable determination is that there is no life in that ground, which is same type of point that James is making about those who claim to have faith but no fruit, no works that support the claim.

Though outward expression does not make our faith genuine, genuine faith will, given time, always produce fruit that reveals that it is good, living faith. Given time, good faith will reveal itself in action toward others. If it doesn’t, in time, then James’ conclusion is that it is not good faith. It cannot save anyone.

II. **Good Faith consists of more than mere belief about God.** (Vv. 18-19)

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 my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

In verses 18-19, James addresses another misconception about faith, specifically related to our beliefs. Simply put, good faith consists of more than mere belief about God. Now, to be sure, James is not downplaying the importance of knowing truth about God. Instead, he is addressing the person who claims to believe true things about God instead of believing in God personally. As James would put it, “Good for you, even the demons believe and shudder at the greatness of God, but that doesn’t make your faith good.”

Good faith does more than simply say, “I believe there is one God.” Good faith says, “I put my trust wholly in the one God.” Acknowledging truth about God is not the same thing as loving and worshipping God. So, for instance, this morning, I will publicly acknowledge that “Nick Saban exists, and that Alabama has a good football team.” But that does not mean that I love them!

What God desire from us more than an acknowledgement of His existence, He desires a relationship with us, which is why Jesus Christ came into the world to save us from our sin and reconcile us to God. We are saved by faith in God’s action on our behalf, which brings us to the final point...

III. **Good Faith trusts God to act.** (Vv. 20-26)

²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? ²¹ Was not our father 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 considered righteous by what they do 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.

In these final verses, James makes the point of the passage exceedingly clear. No longer could his audience believe that all God requires of them is some sort of acknowledgment of His existence. When James says that a “person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone,” he is not contradicting what the apostle Paul taught us in the book of Galatians regarding justification by faith. In Galatians, Paul was dealing with people who believed that they had to add to the work of Christ in order to be saved. Here in the book of James, James was dealing with people who believed that they simply had to acknowledge that Jesus lived, died, was buried, and rose again, without actually placing their trust in him.

To place one’s trust in Christ, in other words, to have a living faith in Christ, means that our lives will be reoriented around the truth of his life, death, burial, and resurrection in such a way that our lives look and sound different from others in our world. To be sure, it is not the difference in our lives that saves us, but rather, our living faith in Christ, a living faith, that given time, will bear fruit. Saving faith always preceded the fruit or the results of faith that reveal the genuineness of our faith, which is point that James is making with His two examples: Abraham and Rahab.

In both cases, Abraham and Rahab had to believe God before they acted in obedience to God. With Abraham, as he made his way up the mountain with his son Isaac, as we are told in Genesis 22, Abraham had to believe that God would provide a solution, even though there was not one immediately obvious. Even as Isaac asked Abraham about the sacrificial ram, Abraham told his son, “God will provide himself a sacrifice.” As Rahab agreed to shelter the Israelites spies in Jericho before God judged the city, Rahab told the spies, “I have heard about what your God has done.” Rahab’s belief in God moved her to place Her truth in God.

In both cases, faith preceded their actions to trust God to act on their behalf. This verse is not teaching that by their actions they saved themselves, but rather that their faith was living, causing them to trust God to act on their behalf.

Conclusion

Their faith resulted in fruit, and though the fruit of their faith did not save them, it demonstrated that their faith was a living faith, a saving faith, because through such faith, they placed their trust in God to act on their behalf. They took God at His Word. They were not willing to simply stand in the crowd and cheer God on from the distance, they were willing to place their life in His hands and trust Him. That is what it means to have a good faith. To place our life in His hands and trust Him with all that we have, knowing that He will take care of us. He will save us. He is faithful.

Three Areas of Application

- 1) How am I using the things that God has blessed me with to reveal my faith in God? (my finances, career, skills/gifts, etc.)
- 2) How am I demonstrating faith in God with my health? (not careless, but resting in Him)
- 3) How am I revealing my faith in God in ways that I share the gospel to others in my life?

My hope for us this morning is that God will use the truths of His word to stir us up this New Year to demonstrate a good, living faith. That we would trust Him and act accordingly. That we would join Him in the work that He is going to accomplish in our lives and through Copperfield Church.

The future is bright not because we are so amazing or capable, but because the God that we are entrusting our lives to is amazing and capable and faithful and willing to use a church like this for His glory and our good.

Have you placed your trust in this God?