

Looking Forward: Part 2
James 2:14-26
Psalm 146:1-10 New Living Translation
James 2:14-26
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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?¹⁵ Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing,¹⁶ and 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.^[a] 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?²² You 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."^[a] He was even called the friend of God.^[b] 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,^[c] so also faith is dead without good works.

PRAY

This is a time of year for celebrations—graduations, weddings, anniversaries! My husband and I are approaching our anniversary in July, and in our ceremony we had a congregational hymn, Rob's favorite, "Take my Life and

let it be, Consecrated Lord to Thee.” But the pastor, thinking he was being funny, announced it as, “Take my WIFE and let me be...!”

In fact, this weekend, a young man Rob and I have known since he was born, married his college sweetheart.

Imagine a groom saying to his bride: “What’s the minimal amount of fidelity and commitment I have to give you, to marry you?” (Do you think that bride might have second thoughts about going through with the marriage?)

Imagine a person applying for a job and saying to the potential boss: “What’s the minimal amount of work I have to do?”

When it comes to faith, Jesus never said:

“Here’s the least amount of truth or doctrine you must affirm in order to make the cut.”

Rather, Jesus said:

“I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10)

Jesus offered us the maximum, life to the fullest.

Jesus also asked of us, his disciples, the maximum:

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for my sake, will find it. Matthew: 16:24-25 NIV

The question is this: What does it mean of salvation? What is the nature of faith?

And furthermore: What is the relationship of between faith and works?

James is extremely practical. He begins by describing a faith which isn’t really a faith at all, because when faced with a need, it responds with a pious platitude. If confronted with one who is in need of food or clothing, it is not helpful to respond with words alone. “Be warmed and filled”. Words alone are empty and change nothing, even if well intended. **James says—if it is within our power to do so, we must take action to address the situation and provide for the need!**

We saw examples of this after the Parkland shooting, the youth from that high school said to the press: “We do not need more ‘thoughts and prayers’. We need action! We need to enact changes so that this does not happen again!”

According to James:

“Faith without action is dead—lifeless—useless—meaningless!”

In essence he is saying that intellectual assent to good theology and sound doctrine, is NOT enough." Belief is the beginning, not the end.

A body without breath is dead. We saw this in the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37).

Faith without action or deeds is dead. "Be doers of the Word, not hearers only." (James 1:22)

Faith does not and cannot begin and end in one's mind, or even in one's heart. Genuine faith may *begin* there, but it does *not end* there. Genuine faith is expressed in a life lived with integrity. Actions—behavior—how we live our lives daily—are the most obvious expressions of our faith.

Some years ago meteorologist from MIT, Edward Lorenz ran some routine experiments which created some unusual results. Lorenz discovered that seemingly tiny and insignificant changes in his data could produce huge differences in the final result. After about ten years of further study he presented a scientific paper on what is now called "the butterfly effect".

According to his theory, the flapping of a butterfly's wing in Brazil does not cause a tornado in Texas, but it can start a chain reaction leading to giant changes in world-wide weather patterns. In other words, even tiny insignificant movements or actions can produce huge changes that affect millions of people. (Kenneth Chang, NYTimes.com, "[Edward Lorenz, Father of Chaos Theory, dies at 90.](#)" 4-17-2008)

If our beliefs affect our actions (as James insists that they do), then those actions will have a bigger impact than we can imagine.

Likewise I wonder: if we *fail* to take action, will there be a reverse "butterfly effect"? Will our lack of action have an equally profound effect in terms of loss of opportunity in the spiritual realm? I wonder...

In this passage, James sets up an argument with an imaginary opponent.

He argues that "faith alone" versus "deeds alone" are both adequate expressions of Christian faith. NOT! Not either/or BUT, both/and!

Ultimately he concludes that you can't have one without the other, IF one is going to have a lively, meaningful faith.

In other words, **faith and works go hand in hand. There must be an integrity of belief—what we know in our minds and hearts—and our behavior, how we live out our lives.**

On the surface there appears to be a conflict or contradiction between the teaching of the Apostle Paul and James when it comes to their theology of salvation. The fact is, they agree, but **they come at faith from different starting points, and they each have a different emphasis.**

Paul says we are saved by grace alone, no human effort can earn God's love or forgiveness. Salvation is a gift; Paul's emphasis is that **we are NOT saved by our deeds, but God's deed on the Cross:** the life/death/resurrection of Jesus' God's one and only son.

James starting place is with a professing Christian. Having been saved by the grace of God, James argues that all believers are to demonstrate their faith through action. His emphasis is that **we are saved for good deeds/works. Our behavior is an outward expression of an interior faith or an expression of our relationship with God.**

I am well acquainted Mary, with a woman whose parents were divorced when she was a child. The non-custodial parent had visitation but rarely took advantage of it. That parent would stay in touch intermittently, and with words—both written and verbal--would repeatedly say: "I love you with all my heart." Nice. The problem? This parent was all talk and no action. This parent's actions did not match these words that were said so glibly.

James gives us two examples of people whose beliefs and actions were integral to their faith. Interestingly both are from the Old Testament: one is male and one is female.

Abraham demonstrated the deepest trust in God that I can imagine—not only by leaving his homeland to cast in his lot with an unknown and unproven God--that was itself an act of great faith. The example James brings into sharp focus for us is Abraham's trust in God, when he is asked to sacrifice his one and only son. Remember...Abe and Sarah had waited decades for Isaac to be born. And then, a few short years later God tells Abraham to offer up this son as a sacrifice?

Now child sacrifice was not uncommon in the ancient world. It is hard to even briefly entertain that thought for me/us today, however Abraham's faith in God was so deep, that he was willing to obey because he believed that God would provide what was needed. In fact, it was at the very last moment, for Isaac is already tied upon the altar when an unwitting lamb shows up on the scene. Abraham is the perfect example of one who could sing the words to "Trust and Obey", for that is exactly what he did! IF this was a test of Abraham's faith, he got an A+. His faith/trust was credited to him as righteousness. In other words, Abraham's right relationship with God is expressed in his actions.(If you want to read this story Genesis 12-22.)

The second example James gives is Rahab. She is a prostitute who aids and abets Joshua and his spies when they are spying out the Promised Land. Rahab helps them escape *and* she strikes a bargain with them in order to save her own hide and that of her family members, when Jericho falls. She keeps her end of the bargain by hiding them and assisting in their escape. Joshua's spies keep their side of the bargain and only Rahab's family

survives the battle of Jericho! Her faith and actions make a difference, which God honors in turn! (Rahab's story is found in Joshua 2-6.)

Friends, as those who call ourselves Christians, we'd best be very, very careful. The world is *listening* to our words. But even more, *the world is watching us, to see if our actions match our words.* *It is very easy **to say** the right thing. It is much harder **to DO** the right thing.*

*We've all known parents who have said to their offspring: **"Don't do what I DO, do what I say!" Why? Because their words and actions do not match—they can talk the talk, but they cannot walk the talk!***

Dead faith is equivalent to no faith OR "all talk, no action".

Dead faith takes no risks. Why should it?

Dead faith expresses no trust in God, rather a lot of trust in oneself.

What does a lively faith look like?

A lively faith is one of integrity, one in which a person's words and actions match up.

John Marks is a producer for the television program 60 Minutes. He went on a two year quest to investigate evangelical Christianity. What he found most compelling, was the response of Christians to Hurricane Katrina. Years after the hurricane, and long after federal assistance had dried up, a network of churches and denominations were still sending regular teams of volunteers to help rebuild houses. Most impressively, to Marks, these efforts crossed racial lines and barriers in the Deep South. One worker told him: "We've had whites, blacks, Hispanics, Vietnamese...we just say let's just help people."

In a book Marks wrote about his experience, he concluded:

"I would argue that this was a watershed moment in the history of American Christianity...nothing spoke more eloquently to believers, and to non-believers who were paying attention, than the success of a population of believing volunteers measured against the massive and near-total collapse government efforts. The storm laid bare an unmistakable truth. More and more Christians have decided that their only way to reconquer America is through service. The faith no longer travels by the word. It moves by deed."

(Reasons To Believe, by John Marks, quoted by Philip Yancy, The Question that Never Goes Away, 2013)

When James says “faith without works is dead” he is saying this: If we claim to believe something, but our actions speak otherwise, then we don’t actually believe what we thought we believed. ***Our actions are a more reliable indicator of our beliefs, than our words.***

Martin Luther, the great champion of justification by faith alone, said this:

“Faith is a living, creative, active, and powerful thing. Faith cannot help doing good works constantly. It does not stop to ask if good works ought to be done, but before anyone asks, it already has done them and continues to do so without ceasing. Anyone who does not do good works in this manner is an unbeliever.”

Is it possible to separate heat and light from fire? No way. Cannot be done. Likewise, faith and action are inseparable!

Josh McDowell used to ask this question:

“If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?”

Friends, Calvary’s charism—our corporate spiritual identity—is

“...a legacy of worshipping God and serving others”.

Together we set aside this time every week for corporate worship. This is a rich time of worship, prayer, and focusing on the Word and the sacraments. But if worship does not equip and motivate us to serve others, then we are according to James, “dead”.

How and when do *you and I* engage in acts of service on a regular basis?

(Remembering that we do so NOT because we are saved by such good works, but because they are an expression of our faith.)

(You’ll have to answer that question for yourself!)

In the last 2 months we have begun a season of discernment. Each week we have considered the following “movements” if you will, in our life together: Looking backward (remembering/learning from CPC’s history)

Looking inward (What’s in it for me, vs. what might I give?)

Looking outward (Is the Great Commission OR is it Great Omission?)

Looking upward (The Necessity of Prayer and the Life-giving Spirit) and

Looking forward (What is our God-given purpose/mission?).

Together the elders and some of you have been reading the book, Autopsy of the Deceased Church.

During this same time the elders and pastors have been interviewing leaders in the community of Enumclaw, gathering information about the challenges and needs facing us.

Come to the book discussion times (listed in the bulletin).

You are invited to **pray** with us as we seek clarity and focus about our mission in the near future. Use the bulletin insert, one prayer a day throughout the week. We need God's guidance going forward!

There are many things we can do, but God has put CPC here for a reason and for "such a time as this". We need to assess not only our gifts and skill sets, but what the needs are in the community and how we might address these going forward.

PRAY.

"Lord, help us walk the talk, and express an integrity of belief and behavior, of word and deed."