

"Faith Can Carry Us Across the Canyons of Life"

By Bob Moore James 2: 14-26

Let us Pray:

Almighty God, speak your Word to us, and guide our feet, that we might be hearers and doers of your word. **Amen.** Our Scripture lesson for today comes from the Epistle of James. James was the oldest, younger brother of Jesus who, after the ascension of Jesus, became head of the church in Jerusalem. James was neither a disciple nor an apostle and his letter is regarded by some scholars to be "Junk Mail". Perhaps that is why it is not used in as many sermons or as widely known as the other epistles. James seems to be writing to Jews who had already become Christians and in 5 short chapters, he writes about specific ways we are to live as Christians. Our passage for today deals with Faith. Listen for the word of God.

Read James 2: 14-26 NSRV

"Faith without works is dead"? What? I thought that we are saved by God's grace through faith, that we could do nothing to earn our salvation. Romans 3:28 "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law", and Paul goes on in Romans 4:3 to reference the same verse about Abraham. "For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." Is James contradicting Paul? Who is right? This is where context becomes an important factor in understanding Scripture. As you read Paul's letter to the church in Rome, it becomes clear that Paul is speaking to people, probably Jewish converts, who were conflicted. The Jews believed that they earned salvation through strict obedience to the law. Paul is telling the Roman church that this has changed, we can no longer earn our salvation. It is a gift given to us by God through Jesus death and resurrection. Also, Paul's use of the word "Faith" is better understood as a belief in Christ and his teachings. James on the other hand, seems to be addressing a group of Christians who have already adopted Paul's view of salvation as a gift and Paul's use of the word faith as belief. While this view is not wrong, James's view of faith is a life style of the heart. James's agrees with Paul that we can do nothing to earn our salvation. However, our lives should reflect our beliefs. To me, this means that our hearts and minds need to work together. It's more than just believing in Jesus, we must reflect Him in our lives through our actions. I refer you to verse 19 of our scripture. Even demons believe in God. So it seems to me that it comes down to our idea of what is faith and what is belief? My Bible Dictionary defines Faith as "A belief in or confident attitude toward God, involving commitment to His will for one's life", While Believe is defined as "to place one's trust in God's truth". I would offer up this as perhaps an oversimplified definition. **Faith is from the heart while belief is from the mind. True faith, requires action, while belief requires understanding.** Once we have belief or "place our trust in God's truth", faith or "a confident attitude toward God, involving commitment to His will for our lives", begins to grow in our hearts. True faith then produces action or works. However, belief often times gets in the way of true faith. I offer the following illustration from a book given to me a few years ago by a close friend. It's a picture based devotional and this one image has been bouncing around in my head ever since I first looked at it. I believe that it illustrates the

difference between belief and faith and speaks to what James is saying. "A traveler, hiking through the wilderness, came to the edge of a canyon. Seeking a way to the other side, he discovered a big rope stretched across the canyon. As his eyes followed the rope toward the other side, he was surprised to see a man coming toward him, confidently pushing a wheelbarrow. As he arrived, the traveler exclaimed, "That was truly amazing!" The man with the wheelbarrow asked, "Do you believe that I can do it again?" "Oh, of course," the traveler replied. "You walked across with such confidence."

"Do you really believe I can do it again?" asked the man with the wheelbarrow. "Definitely," replied the traveler. "Very good, then," said the man with the wheelbarrow. "Hop in and I will take you across." "Many of us look at God the same way we look at the man with the wheelbarrow. We say we have faith that God can do anything. Yet when it comes time to get into the wheelbarrow, our faith begins to dwindle." What if the man with the wheelbarrow was Jesus? Would you get in then? Ever since I came across this devotional, I have been questioning myself. Could I get in? I have tried to look at all of the different nuances of this illustration and here is what I have come up with. We are all on a faith journey, walking an unknown path in life. The canyons represent the hard times or obstacles that will block our way from time to time. The rope is the narrow path that we must follow to get where we are going. The man with the wheelbarrow is Jesus showing us the way across those canyons. Jesus first demonstrates the way across proving it possible. He questions our belief in His ability to do it again, then says that our faith requires action. We must get into that wheelbarrow. Notice though, that Jesus doesn't say to us, "you can do it too" or "Follow me". **NO**, He says "get in, I will take you across". When I consider the life applications of this story, I come up with 3 types of people. First, there are those who come to the edge of this canyon and say that my faith journey ends here. I don't need to go any further and they stop moving. Jesus says "follow me and I will make you fishers of men." Second, are those who say no, I will do this my own way. I will climb down into the canyon, face whatever unknown is there and climb up the other side. I will find my own way across. Jesus says "No one comes to the Father except through me" Third, are the people who will put their faith in God into action and allow Jesus to take them across. Faith without works is dead. I have personally experienced and witnessed many events in my life that I truly believe show God at work and I have unwavering faith that I will be with God someday in Heaven. However, if I was actually, physically standing at the edge of that canyon looking at that rope and wheelbarrow.... Here is where I think the problem lies. I believe there is a difference between belief and faith and I think that our belief can sometimes get in the way of our faith. Earlier I said that **Faith is from the heart while belief is from the mind. True faith, requires action, while belief requires understanding.** I refer you to the story of Peter walking on water in Matthew 13. The disciples are in a boat being tossed about by the wind when they see Jesus walking toward them on the water. Peter says "Lord, if it's you, tell me to come to you on the water." Jesus says "come". So Peter climbs out of the boat and begins to walk on the water toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and began to sink. For a brief moment, Peter was led by Faith from his heart and forgot about his worldly belief that we can't walk on water. Peter cries out to Jesus and Jesus saves Peter and then says to him, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?" True faith requires us to let go of what we think and be led by God's will. It requires us to stop thinking and just do. Set this world's logic aside and live **in** the word of God. Jesus tells us in Matthew 17: 20, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move." In Matthew 21:21 Jesus says "I tell

you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt,you can say to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and it will be done." Where does doubt come from, but from our mind. It comes from the beliefs of this world. We know that we can't command a mountain to move and expect it to move. RIGHT? WRONG! This world tells us that. This world says that Virgin Birth is impossible, yet it happened. This world says that the Seas can't be parted by raising a staff into the air, yet it happened. This world says that a man hung on a cross, dead and buried for 3 days, can't come back to life. Yet it happened. We are called to live *in* this world, not *of* this world. We must rise above the things of this world and put our faith in Jesus. We are to have faith beyond understanding just as the woman did that was healed by simply touching the hem of Jesus cloak. Jesus told her that "Her faith has made you well." We must believe the things that God has done, even when this world's logic says they are impossible. My friends, let me amend what I said earlier. **Faith is from the heart while belief is from the mind. True faith, requires action, while belief in God requires acceptance.** We must accept the things that God says even when we don't understand. We must open our minds to accept the things that we can't understand so that our faith may grow without doubt. That is what will enable us to get into that wheelbarrow, because with God, all things are possible. God sent Jesus as living proof of that. Jesus first demonstrated that he could take the wheelbarrow across that rope first before asking us to get in.

Did you know that the word "Faith" appears 246 times in the King James translation of the Bible. 244 of those are in the New Testament, and only 2 of are in the Old Testament. God sent Jesus to be a living example of faith in God and the power that comes with it. His life is set forth as an example of how we are to live *in* this world, but not *of* this world. My friends, what if *you* are the only Bible that someone ever reads? What message will they hear? Are the works of your life leading others to know God? "Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead." We can't just say that we believe in God, we must show it in the way that we live. The woman had the faith that she could be healed by simply touching the cloak of Jesus, but her faith required action. You have heard it said that every journey begins with the first step and ends with the last step. Our faith grows with every step we take. It requires action, movement to grow. When we stand at the edge of those canyons we must put our worldly beliefs aside and show our faith by getting into that wheelbarrow and letting Jesus take us safely across. We know what awaits us at the end of our journey. Our faith in Him will get us there.

Amen.

Benediction:

My friends, Jesus lives today *in* us. It is **through** Him that we do what we do. It is **because** of Him that our faith is not dead. It is **with** Him that we can move mountains. He stands there waiting for us to get into that wheelbarrow so that he may take us across that canyon and continue on our faith journey. May God help you to grow in faith so that you might reach your fullest height of faith. May God bless you with new life, Christ tend you in grace, and the Holy Spirit guide your steps, as you walk by faith now and forever. Amen.