FAITH WORKS

James 2:14-26

The late Dr. Charles Allen, when he was pastor of United Methodism’s largest

church in Houston, Texas, shared, tongue-in-cheek, a survey he once made in his

church:

10% of the members cannot be found

20% - never attend

25% - never pray

35% - never read the Bible

40% - never give financially to the church

70% - never attend Sunday evening service

75% - never assume any church task

85% - never invite anyone to church

95% - never win a soul to Jesus

100% - expect to go to heaven!

It reminds me of the old black spiritual that goes, “Everybody talkin’ about

Heaven ain’t necessarily going’.”

Now, you can see why James included these twelve verses in his instruction

manual on the relationship between faith and works. James writes to share that an

authentic faith confession results in readily observable commitments.

The primary aim of James’ writings in this epistle was not to write new truths, but to awaken Christians to the truths they already knew – but had forgotten - or chosen NOT to follow.

The followers of Jesus had allowed their faith expression to become idle. They

were no longer an inspiration, providing illumination for others to see the Christ live in them. They had heard the great teachers and prophets of the Old Testament explain the relationship between doctrine and its application to everyday life and behavior, but they’d gotten lazy.

James knew what truth faith was, but his emphasis was on what true faith does.

Martin Luther, struggled with the Book of James for a long time because he

thought it supported a work righteousness salvation, wrote, “Good works do not make a good man – but a good man does good works.” James states the same thing in verse 26 – “Faith without works is dead.”

There’s no major difference between Paul’s teaching and the teaching of James.

We are not talking about a faith vs. works controversy.

The key issue for Paul is how one gains right standing before God – while for James, the issue is how one demonstrates to others the claim to have such right standing.

Paul’s focus is inward. It centers on a person’s relationship with God.

James’ focus is outward. It centers on relationships with other people.

Paul writes how one begins the Christian life

James writes about how one lives the Christian life.

The issue for James is sanctification.”

James is not talking about works as a means to salvation, but as a proof of faith.

Paul’s perspective is the root of our salvation

James’ perspective is the fruit of our salvation.

1. James teaches that real faith is involved in the real world – it is not invisible.

He gives us an example of the wrong attitude

James 2:15 If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food,

16 And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?

Faith by itself – if not accompanied by action – is dead or idle.”

James urges Christians to pray

Jas 5:13 Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

14 Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord:

16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Christians pray in order to immerse themselves in the presence of God – so they then can engage themselves in the purposes of God.

Jas 1:26 If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

James has already stated what real religion is made of. Now he reminds us what it is to live it out. You know electricity when you touch it. It has power and a charge. That is what James says is to

be said of a follower of Christ. You know the source of their power.

OUR FAITH NEVER EXISTS IN ISOLATION – IT IS complete

Our faith commitment to Jesus Christ, while deeply personal, is never private.

G. K. Chesterton was absolutely correct when he said, “A man can no more possess a

private religion - than he can possess a private sun, moon or stars.”

Every time we pray the Lord’s Prayer, we declare – give us this day OUR daily

bread – not give me this day MY daily bread. We are reminded that our “bread” must

never come at the expense of any other human being on the face of the earth. We are

reminded that we are part of a larger community of faith and humanity.

Here at EUMC, we do our best never to allow anyone in our church fellowship to

go hungry! Last week at our Administrative Board meeting I shared how important our

Pastor’s Discretionary Fund has been to our church family.

Genuine faith is never indifferent, but always looking for a place to be involved.

We put our love into action! As Dwight Moody once said, “We put the gospel message

into shoe leather or boots!” This is why we take the “One Great Hour of Sharing”

offering – which is in your church envelope box for today.

BELIEF IS CONFIRMED BY BEHAVIOR.

In verses 18-20, James says, “Yes, you believe – but even the demons believe.”

What are the results of your beliefs? There is a BIG difference in believing there is a

God – and placing faith and trust IN God. You see demons can recite scriptures and

be awestruck, but demons are not saved. There is no partnership or relationship

between their godly beliefs and their behavior. They know ABOUT being transformed,

but they are not transformed.

As the evangelist, Luis Palau, writes, “Just reading the Bible doesn’t mean you

are a Christian. When Karl Marx was seventeen years old, he wrote a fantastic

explanation of part of John’s gospel. Great theologians agree with much of what he

said, but Karl Marx eventually rejected the Bible’s authority and during his adult life,

called himself an atheist, a communist – anything but a Christian.

“And Nikita Khrushchev, the former premier of the USSR, read the Bible when he

was a boy. Yet later, he made it his ambition to bury the church in the Soviet Union by

1965. Instead, he is buried and the Russian Church continues to grow!

“Read the bible all you can . . . Since it is God’s word, we can trust it completely.

But remember, just reading the Bible won’t make you a Christian.”

It is when we put our faith into practice that we show exactly what kind of faith it

is. Is it saving faith or a self-centered faith? Since we believe in God, we must watch

our tongues and help the poor.

WORKS ARE AN EXPRESSION OF FAITH.

Can you imagine Moses saying, “Lord, I believe what you say about the Egyptian

treatment of the Jews, but surely you don’t expect me to go, do you?” God is more than

a mental image and asset. He empowers us to act in human history. There is a

correlation between our confession and our conviction.

Anthony DeMello, whose inspirational stories have been ready by millions, has

written this incisive first-person story:

On the street, I saw a small girl, cold and shivering in a thin

dress, with little hope for a decent meal. I became ANGRY and

said to God, “Why did you PERMIT this?” For a while, God

said nothing. That night, He replied quite suddenly, “I certainly

DID something about it. I made YOU!”

This is exactly what James is sharing in this lesson.

In verses 20-26, James demonstrates how ridiculous it would have been for

Abraham and Rahab to have faith – but never to act upon that faith.

A Salvation Army preacher was greeting parishioners at the door of his meeting

house on Easter Sunday. He said to one man, “I want you in the army of the Lord!”

“I am in the army of the Lord,” came the reply.

“Then why do I only see you at Christmas and Easter?”

With a twinkle in his eye, the man said, “Because I am in the secret service!”

James knew the Christian faith was not a call to be in the secret service but to be

in the everyday world of God’s service.

He heard Jesus challenging the people of faith to be salt and light not leaven. The world needs salty

Christians – we already have enough faulty ones!

The Roman Emperor, Hadrian, was concerned about the growing Christian

movement so he asked a secular journalist to write about what he observed. He wrote:

They love one another. They never fail to help widows; they save

orphans from those who would hurt them. If they have something,

they give freely to the man who has nothing; if they see a stranger,

they take him home, and are happy, as though he were a real

brother. They don’t consider themselves brothers in the usual sense,

but brothers instead, through the Spirit, in God.

Thank God their faith was alive and kicking. Thank God they were not part of the

secret service.

FINALLY, FAITH AND WORKS ARE INTERWOVEN TOGETHER, LIKE TWO SIDES

OF A COIN.

The example of one man whose faith worked to save a nation.

ENGLAND BEFORE AND AFTER JOHN WESLEY. it was through the ministry of John

Wesley that literally saved Great Britain from the bloody revolution that took place in

France.

.” John Wesley not only preached the gospel – he lived it. Faith does work when it is deeply rooted in the power and purposes of God.

Fruit just comes when it is the result of a life lived for God.

May God give us grace so to be and so to do.