

Sunday Feb. 14, 2021
Lesson 11: Faith and Actions
Scripture: James 2: 14-26

Context:

Our series continues to focus on God's hope for humanity and a new sub theme: dealing with hypocrisy and holiness. The next lesson continues on in the book of James as we go on to the rest of chapter two. Today we will focus on how even dead faith is subject to resurrection.

Here the style of the author shifts from an appeal to the law and personal motivation. Now, the diatribe style returns back to the requirements of faith.¹ The focus becomes on "dead faith."

For the author, "dead faith" is rooted in claiming to have faith and yet there are no fruits in the person's life. It is equivalent to the person who hears the word but does not put it into practice (as found in verses 22-24).² The example the author uses to make their point is that of a brother or sister who is naked or hungry and then sending that person off with the statement: "Best wishes!" The idea of living faith in contrast to dead faith focuses on relationships and practical ways of being.

To continue the point being made, the author looks at how others might claim that one person possesses faith while the other possesses action. Then, the author moves on to an imaginary opponent using ideas and concepts from that time. They mention how even demons can recognize God, but demons do not understand the second part of the confession in Deuteronomy "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart..."(Deut. 6:5-6).³ Demons may know there is God and yet because of what they are, they cannot confess the second part to love God with their heart and to love your neighbor as yourself.

Since the author knows they are speaking to various groups including Gentiles and Jewish Christians, they make references to the Old Testament. The first allusion is to be expected. Abraham was a familiar paragon of faith in both the Jewish and early Christian circles. In Genesis, it was a consistent theme of Abraham to place faith in God.

The second allusion is a little different. Rahab is the one known for assisting the Jews as they entered the Promised Land and is even celebrated in the genealogy of Jesus.⁴ She too showed faith as she was hospitable and opened up her home. The author thus concludes how Christians are called to be people of faith. The soul is kept alive when we

¹ PHEME PERKINS, "First and Second Peter, James, and Jude," *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2012), 112.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 113.

⁴ Ibid., 114.

see how our faith plays out in every day life, making commitments and putting our actions with our words.

Application

Have you ever heard the phrase “put your money where your mouth is?” It is often used to urge people to pair their words with their actions. This account in James is a more eloquent and faithful way of expressing this statement. If we are a resurrection people, then we should be act as those who are resurrection people.

The church as a whole can be a very stable, static institution. We are good at maintaining what has always been and protecting tradition to the best of our ability. In many ways, this can be incredibly powerful for the good in the chaos of the world. One can always expect the church to not make hasty or rash decisions. There is power in declaring one God now and forever.

However, the church can also run into the risk of becoming stale in how we live and breathe in the world today. It is good enough to say we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Yet what good is it if we use it only as a token to make sure our way is prepared for the pearly gates?

In many ways the attitude of James towards those imaginary opponents as named in our passage stand in need of the same message today. There are many people who are good at naming how we have one God, yet prefer the faith without works because it allows them to not face the embarrassment of radical disruptions in their lives or relationships.⁵ For example, twice as many Americans explicitly claim to be members of churches or synagogues than actually participate in the activities of those groups.⁶ It is all good and well to say you belong to God because it is seen as the respectful or honorable thing to do.

Yet to have a living faith invites risk. When we have a living faith, we watch as we follow God and see that the guarantees may not be there as we would like. Being nice and hospitable to visitors does not mean they will join your church and the good old days will return. Withholding your money in the bank does not mean your future will be secure. Being good and moral will not prevent pain or suffering from coming to you.

A living faith invites us to see how being a follower of Jesus is not always a beautiful picture or something that is easy. How many times in the gospel did Jesus warn people of the dangers of following him? You may lose your wealth, your family, you status in the community, even your name. And nor does he promise everything you would want after you die. Unfortunately, Christian culture has not done a good job of painting such a picture as if to entice people and offer them some form of an investment.

Instead, a living faith invites us to follow Jesus and see how our words are to match our actions. We are challenged to not just say Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. That’s easy. Anyone can do as much, even perhaps naming the day they realize Jesus saved them.

The question now becomes how our words are paired with our actions. As we place our faith in Christ as our Lord and Savior, we are called to a faithful life. We are

⁵ Ibid., 113.

⁶ Ibid.,

called to give extravagantly, serve authentically, and live boldly not afraid to try new things or go to new places. As we do, our faith is transformed into something alive and we become a resurrection people.

Why do you think it is easier to profess faith than live faithfully? What holds you back from placing your faith in the Lord? How can living boldly for our Lord transform our churches and our communities?

Rev. E. Hunter Pugh
Pastor of Brantley – Brunson Chapel Charge
PO Box 71
Brantley, AL 36009