

“How to Have Real Faith”

Text: James 2:14-26

February 18, 2007

Park Boulevard Presbyterian Church (www.pbpc.org)

Oakland, California

Rev. Chris Geline

Best friends at odds illustration!

This leads us to look at what James has to say about how to have “real faith.”

- There are a lot of phony religions out there – people who think they are Christians and really aren’t. In the biblical text for this morning James talks about the difference between real and counterfeit Christians, authentic believers and fake believers.
- He talks about how you have real faith.

Read James 2:14-26 & Pray!

This is one of the most controversial and misunderstood passages in the book of James.

- Many cults will use this to say that this passage proves you have to work your way to heaven.
- What does the entire New Testament say about salvation: WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH ALONE.
- Paul writes, *“By grace, through faith, we are saved.”*
- James comes along and says, “It’s not just faith but faith and works.” What was he talking about? What are we to think about this?
- They are both right, but are talking about different things.

Paul and James are fighting two different enemies and use the word “works” in different ways.

- Paul is talking about the problem of legalism – people who say “I’ve got to keep all the Jewish laws and regulations to be a Christian.”
- James is talking about the problem of laxity – those who say “It doesn’t matter what you do as long as you believe.”
- Paul focuses on the root of salvation – what happens to me internally.
- James focuses on the fruit of salvation – what happens on the outside. Jesus said, *“By their fruits you will know them.”*
- Paul is talking about how to know I’m a Christian.
- James is talking about how to show I’m a Christian.

Summed up in Ephesians 2:8-10, *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, for a life of good works that God has already prepared for us to do.”*

- Three prepositions in this passage – “by grace”, “through faith”, “for good works”. If you get those out of order you are in trouble.

But how do I show that I am a believer? James says there are five ways you can know you've got the real thing from this passage.

I. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU SAY.

A. Vs. 14, *“What good is it my brothers and sisters if a person claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?”*

1. It doesn't say they actually have faith, just that they claim to have it. They talk about it and know all the right phrases. There are a lot of people who claim to be Christians.
 - a. George Gallup – Over 50 million Americans say “I'm born again,” but you don't see anything in their lifestyle.
2. It's more than just talk that is involved in real faith. Jesus said, *“Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord, Lord’ is going to enter into the kingdom of heaven.”* Not everyone with a Christian bumper sticker or who wears a cross necklace is a Christian.
3. Talk is cheap. Remember when Larry Flint, the publisher of Hustler, said he was born again? But you never saw any change in his life. He kept right on printing pornography. No difference. No change.
4. Phony faith is when someone claims to be a Christian but there's no evidence in their life.

II. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU FEEL.

A. It's more than emotions. People can confuse emotions and sentiment with faith. I've heard people say they like the warm fuzzies that the church experience brings, but it never makes any difference in their lives.

1. James gives an illustration. Vs. 15, *“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says, to him ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?”*
2. Peanuts cartoon: Charlie Brown and Linus are inside all bundled up and Snoopy's out in the cold shivering in front of an empty dog food bowl. Charlie and Linus are having a discussion about how sad it is that Snoopy is hungry and cold. “He's cold and hungry. We ought to do something about it.” They walk outside and say to Snoopy, “Be of good cheer, Snoopy.” Do you know where Charles Schultz got that idea? From this verse. What good is it if you see someone in need and you say, “I feel for you!”
3. Real faith is more than just sympathy and feelings. Real faith takes the initiative, gets involved with people, and is practical. He's talking about Christians here. When you become a part of God's family you have family responsibilities. A real believer will care about other believers.

4. 1 John 3:17, *“If any of you has material possessions and sees his brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in you?”*

III. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU THINK.

- A. For some, faith is an intellectual journey – a matter to be studied, debated, talked over and discussed. James imagines this intellectual objector in vs. 18, *“But someone will say, ‘You have faith, I have deeds’”*. He’s imagining some intellectual guy who says, “You’re into faith, I’m into works. Different strokes for different folks.”
- B. But James says, *“Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by what I do.”*
1. **“Show me”** Real faith is visible. How do you know for sure about someone’s faith? James says, “Show me.” If you claim to be a Christian I have a right to ask you to prove it by looking at your lifestyle.
 2. Someone once said, “Faith is like calories. You can’t see them but you can sure see the results.” You can’t see faith but you can see the results.
- C. Jimmy Carter in his book “Why Not the Best?” said that “One of the things that was a turning point in his life is when somebody asked him the question, ‘If you were arrested for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?’” That’s a good question. That’s what James was talking about.
- D. Paul writes, *“Any time a person becomes a Christian you become a new person inside, the old things have passed away. All things become new.”* Not overnight. But they start becoming new.

IV. REAL FAITH IS NOT JUST SOMETHING YOU BELIEVE.

- A. Vs. 19, *“You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder!”*
1. There are a lot of people who have strong beliefs in God, the Bible, about Christ. They can recite creeds to you and catechisms and talk about doctrines of the Trinity, quote Bible verses. James says, “Big deal!” Just saying I believe in God is not enough to get you to heaven. Even the devil believes that. 96% of Americans believe in God. That’s not enough.
- B. The word “believe” in the Greek means “to trust in, to cling to, to rely on, to commit yourself completely.” I believe in a clean environment, but that doesn’t make me a “Greenie”. I’m a Christian because I believe in Jesus. It’s more than head knowledge. A lot of folks are going to miss heaven by 18 inches. They’ve got it in their head but not their heart.

If faith is not just something you say or think or feel or believe, what is faith?

V. REAL FAITH IS SOMETHING YOU DO.

- A. Faith is active. It's not passive. It's a commitment. Two illustrations: Abraham and Rahab. Two very different people.
- Abraham was Jewish. Rahab is a Gentile.
 - Abraham is a patriarch. Rahab is a prostitute.
 - Abraham is a somebody. Rahab is a nobody.
 - Abraham is a major character in the Bible. Rahab is a minor character.
- B. James uses these illustrations to say, it doesn't matter who you are as long as you've got the important thing. They only had one thing in common – their faith in God. Their faith led them to an action.
1. Abraham – Vs. 20, *"You foolish person, Do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar. His faith and his actions were working together. His faith was made complete by what he did. Scripture was fulfilled when it said, 'Abraham believed God.'" How do we know it? We saw it. He behaved in a way that his belief came out visibly. Abraham was already a believer. God told him to do something and he obeyed it.*
 2. Rahab – The story is in Joshua 2. It's the story of how a prostitute helped a couple of spies when they were coming into Jericho. Rahab ends up in the family line of Jesus. She risks her life to save the spies.

In a real sense what God is saying to us this morning is this: Talk is cheap. Put your money where your mouth is. "I believe in Jesus!" Prove it. Our faith is demonstrated by our actions. Actions speak louder than words. Our behavior shows what we really believe.

Prayer:

Some of you have been struggling with doubts about whether you have really been a believer or not. You say, *"I don't remember a time when I specifically asked the Lord to take over my life. I've believed about Christ. Maybe I've never believed in Him. I want to settle it today."*

If you're not sure, if you've got those doubts, settle it this morning. Pray this, *"Lord, I want to have a real faith, not a phony faith."* What does it mean to believe? It means commitment. It's more than intellectual knowledge. Would you pray in your heart right now, *"Jesus Christ, I give every area of my life to you as best as I know how. I want to give as much of me as I understand to as much of You as I understand and I want to learn more about You. God, I give you my past, all the things that have happened, the good and the bad, the achievements, the faults, the sins, the mistakes. I ask you to take it all. I admit that I've gone my own way many times. I haven't consulted you. I've made my*

own decisions without talking to you about them. I ask you to forgive me. Lord, I not only give you my past, I want to give You my future. I don't know what it holds but I know You know it. I want to follow You as best as I know how. I want to be a real believer. Jesus Christ, I want to give You my present, right now. Take my life and make me the person You want me to be. Help me to grow. Help me to know that I'm a Christian and help me to show it in my life by obeying Your word. Thank You for loving me. Thank You for dying for me on the cross. Help me to understand it more. I want to commit all of it to You, the problems and the possibilities of my life."

The Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." If you prayed in your heart and meant it, I believe God heard you. Elders please stand so those who have prayed to God this morning can see someone they can talk to about their real faith.

"Lord, thank you for your word. Thank You that it's so clear. We can understand that real faith is not something we say or feel or believe but it is something we do. We commit ourselves to you today. In Jesus' name, Amen."