

Faith in Action

- There was a comedy that aired years ago called “Third Rock from the Sun” which posited a group of aliens coming to earth as a pretend family to observe and try to understand our human race. The entire comedy is based around aliens who had no knowledge of the intricacies of human life trying to bring understanding and meaning to it as they attempt to mimic human behavior.
 - What would happen if you were the subject of this kind of observation? What if unbeknownst to you, you had been observed in all you have done for the past week? 30 days? 3 months? (Some people think this is what is happening with the Alexa in your home)
 - Take a moment and think about your week. About what you did. How you responded to crisis. To other people. What you spent your money on. Where you used your time.
 - What conclusion would they come to about you?
 - When they went back to report to their superiors and describe who you are, what would they say makes you tick. What would they say about what you believe? About what is important to you? Having observed how you live, what would they say? More importantly, are you completely content with this?
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- We are going through a letter. A letter written by James, the half brother of Jesus.
 - James, who had grown up around Jesus and thought he was crazy, had seen his brother after he had died and risen from the dead. Once that happened, he was all in for the mission of Jesus. He not only believed that Jesus was his Savior but he ended up being a leader in the local church.
 - His desire was for people to follow Jesus and to live powerful lives that mattered and brought the kind of life they were looking for.
 - Our theme for this entire series that comes from this letter is that **AUTHENTIC FAITH PRODUCES AUTHENTIC DEEDS**. You cannot separate what you say you believe from how you live.
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- Turn to James chapter 2, starting at v14. We heard this read earlier.
 - Just like he has done throughout this letter, James makes a statement, a kind of thesis, and then proceeds to illustrate and prove this thesis.
- James 2:14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?.*
- This is a powerful statement. His thesis is that faith without actions is a useless and powerless faith. In fact, he is going so far as to say if you think you have faith and it is not proven out in your life, that faith has no value to salvation.
 - This is the part of the book that really causes many to wonder how this can be true because it seems at odds with other teachings that say our works have nothing to do with our salvation.
 - These two things are not in conflict with each other and we are going to unpack this but here is what we need to grab a hold of.
 - **TRUE FAITH IS RADICAL OBEDIENCE.**
 - Faith, a full trust in Jesus Christ, will result in radical obedience to the leading and direction of the Savior we claim to follow.
 - True faith is not praying a prayer. It is not being religious. It is not achieved through what we know.

- James tells us three things:
- First, actions make our faith real.
- Second, knowledge and good intentions alone are harmful. I am going to go more quickly through these first two because I want to land on number three.
- Third, our actions are what defines our relationship with God.

I. Actions makes faith real.

- Most translations use the word *works* or *deeds* but it is better translated *action*.
- The faith that does not lead to action is not a saving faith.
- Just like he did a section earlier, James posits a situation. Perhaps it is one that happened or maybe it is made up. Either way, he makes his point.
- This is a similar word picture to the beginning of the chapter.
15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.
- There is someone who has needs. The verb tense indicates that this is an ongoing need.
- This is someone within the church. A brother or sister.
- We become aware of this need. How we respond to that need is what reveals the authenticity and reality of our faith claims.
- As John Crist says in one of his videos, we have a lot of spiritual ways to say no.
- "It's not God's timing right now."
- "I'm feeling led in a different direction."
- "I don't feel peace about it right now."
- "God has a different assignment for me."
- "I'm not in that season right now."
- "I'm in a season of creating margin."
- In many cases, it's a spiritual way to say no to God and others in a way that keeps us from feeling guilty. That's James entire point.
- The whole term "Go in peace" in that culture was like saying "good-bye and good luck."
- They are actually praying that God would meet the needs of his people but not getting involved themselves.
- If that is our attitude, our way of responding, then our faith is pointless. There is no benefit to others OR us.
- Pat answers do not work.
- The one I hear the most. I'll be praying for you.
- Praying is great . . . but too often it means, "I need to get out of this conversation without committing any time or money to this."
- Try this. Pray now. As you are standing there. Then do something.
- God's primary vehicle for helping the people he puts in your path? You!
- Actions must be integrated with faith.
- How we respond to the needs of those around us, particularly those in God's faith family, is what puts flesh on our faith.
- When we pull away, live for ourselves, and more, our faith is simply not real. We can claim to have this wonderful faith, but we are fooling ourselves.
- The works that James is talking about are not religious works of the law (that Paul talks about) like circumcision but the actions that result from a life of love.
- **TRUE FAITH IS RADICAL OBEDIENCE.**

18 But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

- James anticipates an objection that you can have a faith focused on doing good works or a faith that focuses on believing the right things.

19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.

- Not only do actions make faith real, but by contrast:

II. Knowledge and good intentions alone are harmful.

- James makes a hyperbolic statement to illustrate.
- You are so worried about having the correct belief system. That is not the way to salvation. The demonic realm, the completely dedicated to evil spirits that are completely opposed to Jesus are monotheists. They know about God. They understand and believe completely in who God is.
- They are overwhelmed and terrified by the truths that they know. Not saved.
- Having good intentions that you never follow through on is less than helpful. Simply knowing more about God and having wonderful intentions to do something "some day" is actually harmful in two ways:
 - First, it has led to a "they should" culture in the church.
 - This is that feeling that "Hey, we pay pastors and staff to do a lot of that stuff. I don't have time for it. Go see the pastor. Make sure the pastor or elder visits that person in the hospital. They should get something done. They should start a ministry.
 - Over the centuries, this has led to a devastating (and completely artificial) separation of the secular and sacred.
 - Our culture at Hope is that if God puts an idea for something in your head, then just maybe he is inviting YOU to run with it. "The church should . . ." does incredible damage.
 - Second, it leads us to passivity. It leads us to ignore the things that God is doing in and around us.
 - When I meet with other pastors, there is a common experience. It is people leaving churches or complaining because they want something "deeper." They want more meat.
 - What they almost always means is, "I like more information. To see more things I've never thought of. To accumulate new and novel ways of seeing God or the Scriptures."
 - They tend to be Christians who feel pretty good about their own maturity. About their bible knowledge. How they are far ahead of those around them. That simple teaching is good for them but I need more.
 - Yet often these same people are not generous with their money. They are selfish with their time. They serve rarely. They have relational problems they won't resolve.
 - Worship is never a substitute for merciful behavior.
 - Good intentions alone have no value.
 - You can know more than anyone in your church doctrinally and all it does is make you proud.
 - A faith that is purely doctrinal is a sham
 - **TRUE FAITH IS RADICAL OBEDIENCE.**

III. Your actions define your relationship with God.

- What you do changes how you believe.

20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 21 Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? 22 You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God,

and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. 24 You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone. 25 In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? 26 As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

- To drive his point home, James gives an example very familiar to his readers, and one most of us know as well.
- Genesis 22.
- Abraham was an old man. He had spent most of his life childless in a culture that put a premium on kids. He had chosen to follow God and God had promised him that he would have a son that would turn into a great nation.
- After decades of waiting, God finally gave him and Sarah a son.
- He loved his son fiercely. His life. His hopes. His dreams. His very faith were wrapped up in that boy.
- *Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love – Isaac – and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”*
- We cannot imagine it. Abraham had given up his extended family. He had moved across the known world. He had uprooted his life. He had sacrificed a lot because God had led him. He had been a follower. Wasn’t it enough! God wanted him to kill his own son?
- We all know the story how he obeyed and how God spared his son at the last second.
- Listen to what James says in v22.
- His faith and actions were working together and his actions brought completeness to his faith.
- Let me be clear. When we speak about being saved through faith and not works, this is entirely correct. Our life in Jesus begins this way. It is grace alone.
- What James is speaking about is how life in Jesus grows and ages.
- Abraham proved his faith was real because he was willing to act on it.
- Hear me! My actions don’t earn anything. They don’t make me more loved.
- BUT . . . my actions define my relationship with God.
- Abraham already had faith. But this event showed his faith to be real and through his obedience, his faith “grew up.” His relationship with God was markedly different after this event than it was before.
- His faith was brought to maturity by what he did.
- What was the result? *“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend.*
- Do you want to be called God’s friend? Do you want that kind of faith? Do you desire a deep, soul-satisfying, best friends, father-child, life giving relationship with Jesus?
- Then live a life of radical obedience.
- In the process of taking this amazing step of obedience, Abraham learned more about God’s character, which in turn further bolstered his faith.
- How we live and act is what matures our faith. As long as faith remains in the realm of theory, your faith, and your relationship with God, will be stunted and not grow and might not even be real.
- Faith in God’s character, promises, instructions, our own experience of all that. This leads us to obey, take risks, be selfless and practice trust. This then gives us a greater and deeper experience of God’s character, promises which gives greater intimacy and trust to obey further which gives deeper relationship and on and on it goes.
- To drive his point home, James makes one other illustration. Instead of Abraham, the patriarch, godly father of the Israelite nation and religion. He was wealthy, moral, male and a

major figure. He refers to Rahab, the prostitute, who was probably poor, immoral, female and a minor figure in society. (Her story is in Joshua 2). Her actions revealed her faith in God and showed her righteousness.

- **TRUE FAITH IS RADICAL OBEDIENCE.**
- This is not about our status in society. It is not about our money or wealth. It is not about what we look like. It doesn't matter if we have it all or have nothing.
- **TRUE FAITH IS RADICAL OBEDIENCE.**
- Hebrews 11 is often called the hall of faith. It lists all those people who had great faith, including both Abraham and Rahab.
- In every single case, what they believed about God informed what they did. Their actions were informed by their faith and their faith was proven and bolstered by their actions.
- The ultimate expression is in Jesus. He lived a life of radical obedience. He followed his father doing exactly what his father led him to do. He had the most intimate, the most amazing relationship with his Father. His obedience led him to live the life we should live and to die the death we should have received.
- Has freed us and proven his character through Jesus. Now he calls us to follow. He is calling you to **RADICAL OBEDIENCE.**
- This is not about doing more good things. This is about being so committed to the one who obediently died for you that your relationship leads you to act.
- **TRUE FAITH IS RADICAL OBEDIENCE.**
- There are not different kinds of faith, with one that results in action and one not. There is only one kind of faith, and if it does not look this way, no matter what you say, it is not real.
- More knowledge and more good intentions will not help you. Your faith and relationship with God are shown by your actions. So start today.
- *"You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step."* (Martin Luther King, Jr.)
- Where is God inviting you to **RADICAL OBEDIENCE?** When we respond, that . . . is true faith.
- Let's be a people where our neighbors, coworkers, family, friends say about us – "There goes someone whose faith is real to them."