

WHAT DOES FAITH LOOK LIKE?



Scripture:

Psalm 15

¹O LORD, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?

²Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right, and speak the truth from their heart; ³who do not slander with their tongue, and do no evil to their friends, nor take up a reproach against their neighbors; ⁴in whose eyes the wicked are despised, but who honor those who fear the LORD; who stand by their oath even to their hurt; ⁵who do not lend money at interest, and do not take a bribe against the innocent.

Those who do these things shall never be moved.

James 1:17-27

¹⁷Every generous act of giving, with every perfect gift, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. ¹⁸In fulfillment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures.

¹⁹You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; ²⁰for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. ²¹Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. ²²But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. ²³For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; ²⁴for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. ²⁵But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. ²⁶If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. ²⁷Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



WHAT DOES FAITH LOOK LIKE?

How would you define religion? Here James defines a pure and undefiled religion as: caring for orphans and widows in their distress, and keeping oneself unstained by the world. Both of those explanations define religion as a verb. Love is a verb; when religion is a verb, faith is also a verb.

How is it to you? Is faith a verb or a noun to you? Today, I want you to ponder a few things inspired by this passage:

- #1 What does faith look like?
- #2 Who was James and why did he write this book/letter?
- #3 Did James really contradict Paul's view of faith?
- #4 How can we all act out our own faith more faithfully?

Before I go further with this, I want to emphasize not just faith in action, but I ask that you ponder for yourself what faith looks like to you in your world?

Could it look like this?



“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not from yourselves; it is the Gift of God.” (Paul’s letter to the Ephesians 2:8.)

FAITH

Jimmy Carter wrote a book called simply, *Faith*. Did you know that?

Some say, “For we live by faith, not by sight.” (From 2nd Corinthians 5:7) Can you say that or do you need scientific evidence that God exists?

TOM’S SHOES

When I think of what faith looks like, I think of Tom’s Shoes. On a trip to Argentina, Blake Mycoskie saw many children without shoes.

He had started lots of little companies before, but decided this time to start something that matters.

Tom’s was named after the word “tomorrow.” When people buy a pair of shoes from his company, those in need get a pair “tomorrow,” or soon after.

He has given away over eighty million pairs of shoes since he began the company in 2010. His motto is: “Start something that matters,” because he started other companies before Tom’s Shoes, but this one matters most. Every purchase has a purpose. And he makes his shoes in countries that need them, teaching the people skills and building schools.

JAMES

Now let’s look back at the author James and why James might have an action oriented perspective on faith.

Many Bible scholars believe James was the son of Joseph and Mary and thus, the brother of Jesus. James’ brother was the greatest Christian activist ever known. Jesus was role modeling faith in action constantly.

Besides being the brother of Jesus, James was the leader of the Jerusalem council. A delegation, including Paul and Barnabas, gathered to confer with the elders of the church in Jerusalem about the future of the church. James was one of the select individuals Christ appeared to after his resurrection and Paul called him a “pillar” of

the church in Galatians 2:9. Yet, sadly, James was martyred c.A.D. 62.

The purpose of the book of James was pastoral. It was a letter to the twelve tribes of new Christians who recently converted from Judaism. As leader of the Jerusalem church, James wrote as their pastor to instruct and encourage his dispersed people in the face of their difficulties. It was sent to Antioch in Syria.

There are certain characteristics that make this letter distinctive from other books in the New Testament:

- (1) Its emphasis on vital Christianity, characterized by good deeds and a faith that works (genuine faith must and will be accompanied by a consistent lifestyle);
- (2) Its simple organization;
- (3) Its familiarity with Jesus' teachings;
- (4) Its similarity to Old Testament wisdom writings such as Proverbs;
- (5) Its excellent Greek. He was well educated as Jesus also was.

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Hebrews was also written to Jews who were new in their faith in Jesus. A very different perspective on faith here: Faith – “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.” Hebrews 11:1

Some people think there was conflict between James and Paul over their definition of faith. James' belief that faith is dead without works seems to be contradictory of Paul's belief that faith comes to us by grace and nothing we do makes it happen.

However, after his conversion, the apostle Paul understood the difference in the basis of his new faith. Under Judaism, God's people lived under that Law. Under Christianity, God's people lived under the grace of Jesus Christ. Throughout his letters, which were in response to questions raised by various churches, the apostle Paul teaches that "faith" is the act of believing.

When addressing Judaism, Paul teaches that righteousness, received by faith in Jesus Christ, is a gift of grace contradicting the Jewish idea that righteousness is based on doing the Law.

With Paul's assertion that righteousness is by faith and not by works, how does this reconcile with James' assertion that justification is by works and not by faith alone? (James 2:24)

DIFFERENT AUDIENCES

Paul and James are making arguments for different audiences. James quotes Genesis 15:6 because he was exhorting Christians to a more Godly life. While much of Paul's preaching regarding "faith" is about justifying faith (faith that saves), he includes faith as a spiritual gift. As a spiritual gift, "faith" here is not for personal enrichment but instead for building up others within the church. Paul believed the spiritual gift of faith is an unusual measure of trust in God. Paul was graced by faith during his conversion. He didn't deserve it at all since he was responsible for the persecution of many Christians.

The two addressed totally different aspects of faith. They are both right!

A PASTOR'S POWERFUL COMMENT

Pastor LaDonna Sanders Nikosi had a powerful comment on this James passage: "Slander, deception, "fake news," and accusation have found new homes in our culture. But this is not true religion. James reminds us that true religion includes being slow to speak and quick to listen and slow to anger, being doers of the true word and not merely hearers."

There is more finger-pointing these days, and less listening to one another and learning how God is working and speaking to and through one another. James reminds us that every good and perfect gift “is from above, coming down from the Father of lights.” True religion, religion itself, is a gift from God. A gift—not an obligation or a measuring stick. True religion comes directly from God to humanity, to creation. And that religion is not for the cutting off or the dividing of the world; it is to bring light into the world.

A LEAP OF FAITH

It takes a leap of faith, (or maybe two leaps) to trust that God has this world in her hands, and that all will work out for good for those who love God. Twelfth century Saint Julian of Norwich famously said, “All will be well, all will be well. All kind of things will be well.” Do you have enough faith to trust in that promise? Your faith in action can help the wellness happen.

Here is what Rob Bell has to say about leaps of faith. A video was shown to the congregation.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EstIjZP0U1c>

Trust in the all in one God. Respond to your gift of faith with joyful works that somehow expand the peace, love, hope and joy in the kingdom of God here on earth that Jesus began. That is our job, to finish the work Jesus started in his three years of ministry on earth as it is in heaven. Amen

Benediction:

Be a doer of the Word. Enjoy simple gifts. And feel free to love all as God loves you.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



**The Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**