

WHERE DO YOU STAND WITH YOUR FAITH? #5

Faith Demonstrated By Deeds

Hebrews 11:3-11, Mark 2:1-12, James 2:14-26

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“There was once a famous German artist named Herkomer, born in the Black Forest, whose father was a simple woodchopper. Herkomer was a gifted artist, and as his reputation grew, he moved to London and built a studio there. He sent for his aged father, and the dad came, full of pride for his son, and lived with him. The old man enjoyed creating things out of clay, and he learned to make very beautiful bowls and vases, items of which he was very proud. So the father and son were in business together as artisans. But as the years passed, the old man’s abilities deteriorated, and at the end of the day, as he went upstairs, he would seem sad because he felt that his work was now inferior.

“Herkomer’s sharp eye detected this, and when his father was safely upstairs and asleep for the night, Herkomer would come downstairs and take in hand the pieces of clay that his old father had left. He would gently correct the defects and the faults, and mold them a little one way or the other. And when the old man would come down in the mornings, he would hold up the pieces in the morning light, smile, and say, ‘I can still do it as well as I ever did.’

“That’s just what our Heavenly Father does with us. We try to do for Him what we can. We visit the sick, teach the children, sing and usher and invite and take food to the bereaved. We send out missionaries and pray for them. **But we’re all frail and flawed, and our work for the Lord isn’t as perfect and pure as we would like. Yet the Lord places His omnipotent hand on it, and shapes it, and uses it in ways far greater than we know.**

“Charles Spurgeon once said, *Don’t hold back because you cannot preach in St. Paul’s; be content to talk to one or two in a cottage; very good wheat grows in little fields. You may cook in small pots as well as in big ones. Little pigeons can carry great messages. Even a little dog can bark at a thief, and wake up the master and save the house. A spark is fire. A sentence of truth has heaven in it. Do what you do right, thoroughly, pray over it heartily, and leave the result to God.*”¹

¹ (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 797-798)

We see that same wisdom in our Scripture lessons today. Hebrews 11 (3-11) lists those who did what was right, thoroughly, prayed over it heartily, and then left the results to God. They dedicated their lives to following the Lord God, did their best in all they did each day, and then moved on to the next day. They could very well have grumbled and focused on the faults and failures of their lives, but instead they let God use their efforts to bring about something good.

Able made a good sacrifice and was counted as righteous. *“And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead”* (Heb. 11:4). Enoch lived each day to please God, and God saved him from experiencing death by taking Him into heaven because he lived well. Noah listened to God and followed His command to make a boat, even though there had not yet been rain on the earth. Enduring great ridicule by those around him, his faithfulness to follow God’s commands saved him, his family, and every kind of the animals of the earth. Abraham followed God’s direction, left his home town and went where God told him to go, and God blessed him with a legacy of *“descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore”* (Heb. 11:12). Each one determined to follow God throughout their lives, following all of His commands, and they were rewarded because of their faith. **When they were called to do something by God, their faithful action produced a righteous response because they were diligently seeking to please God with their lives.**

In Mark’s Gospel (2:1-12), we heard how friends of a paralyzed man had such faith in Jesus that they carried their friend to where Jesus was teaching, confident that Jesus could heal him. When they could not get into the house where Jesus was teaching because there were so many people surrounding it, they tore a hole in the roof and let their friend down through the roof right before Jesus, so that He could heal their friend. Instead of waiting for Jesus to get done teaching in the house, they put their faith into action so that their friend could become healed, and they were rewarded for their faith. **It wasn’t enough for them just to sit by the side of their friend and ask God to heal him. They put their faith into action and took him to the One they knew could heal him.**

The owner of the house was probably not very happy with them, but this man’s life was much

more valuable than a roof of a house, which could easily be repaired and restored. These guys were so adamant about getting help for their friend that not even a roof could get in their way to getting him before Jesus. Not only did Jesus then forgive their friend of his sins, but Jesus commanded him to “stand, take up his mat and walk” (Mark 2:9 & 11). And the man, having such faith in Jesus, he did what he was told, no longer thinking about his being paralyzed, but took Jesus at His word, stood up, gathered up his mat and walked out of the house, completely restored. His faith led him to action and it brought about a new life for him and all those around him.

And then we get to our lesson from James 2:14-26. Listen to these challenging words of how we are to put our own faith into action. (READ James 2:14-26).

It is indeed good for us to have faith in the Lord Jesus as the Savior of the world, forgiving us of our sins and promising us a reward with Him in heaven when we finish our life here on the earth. But Jesus didn't invite us to keep our faith to ourselves. **It's not enough for us just to have faith! We need to demonstrate that faith by what we do with our lives.** No matter what we do as a career, our faith is to be demonstrated by our daily living, touching the lives of those around us in such a way as to let them see that faith in God is beneficial for everyone to have.

James makes the same argument. He tells us that unless we put our faith into action and work for the Lord in ways that bring about the righteousness of God, that faith that we think we have, is worthless and even dead. He says, “*In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead*” (Ja. 2:17). He gives an example of wishing folks who are in need well, but not offering to help them with the essentials of life. **Is our faith really viable if we don't put it to work?**

“A minister was approached by a man who wanted to join the church. ‘But,’ the man said, ‘I have a very busy schedule. I can't be called on for any service, such as committee work, teaching, or singing in the choir. I just won't be available for special projects or to help with setting up chairs or things like that. And I'm afraid I'll never be able to go on visitation, as my evenings are all tied up.’

“The minister thought for a moment, then replied, ‘I believe you're at the wrong church. The

church you're looking for is three blocks down the street, on the right.'

"The man followed the preacher's directions and soon came to an abandoned, boarded up, closed church building. It was a dead church - gone out of business."² How could that be? Let me explain.

None of the people in the list of the faithful in Hebrews 11 are listed merely because they had faith. No, their faith in the Lord God was demonstrated by their actions, stepping out in their faith to do what the Lord had asked or commanded them to do. We can read their accounts in the Old Testament. The faith of the person is always listed before the statement of faithful action done in obedience to the Lord our God. Faith preceded the action, and that was seen as righteousness.

Hebrews 11:6 accurately states, "*And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.*" God desires our obedience to Him, and that can only happen as we first know who God is, know His commands and then believe God's Word, and finally act upon that Word to put feet on our faith.

Any church without faithful believers acting upon their faith by serving the Lord our God is just a building with a name plate in front of it. Without faithful believers serving the Lord, there would be no one to keep the building in good condition; there would be no one to teach the classes and disciple the youth; there would be no one to delegate the financial investments because there would be no financial investments because the members would not give to the church unless they had faith in God and in the ministry of the church. Without members contributing to the missions funds, there would be a lot fewer missionaries working in the world because they wouldn't have the resources to continue.

Without faithful members serving in leadership roles of the church, there would be no activities planned because no one would serve on the committees, no special music in worship because there would be no choir, no projection of the power-point because we wouldn't even have the equipment to do so, no one to hand out the bulletins because no one would do the bulletins, there'd be no one to turn on the lights or turn up the heat because, frankly, we wouldn't have the money to pay for the gas or the

² (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 800)

electric, and there would be no one to keep the floors clean and the bathrooms supplied with toilet paper.

Without members who put their faith into action, we'd not have any endowments or educational funds to help students go to school. There's be no resources to help members go to various places to help others come to know about Jesus; there'd be no Bible studies because no one would step up to lead them; there'd be no meals prepared for the hungry folks in Sheboygan because no one would have stepped up to modify the kitchen into its present condition and no one to cook or serve the meals; there would be no one to offer prayers to the sick and lonely and sorrow-worn, and there would be no one to visit the shut-ins or delight those in nursing homes with special music performances.

What would it look like for the church not to have someone care for the grounds of the church? We'd have the city on our backs because the yards would be filled with weeds and tall grass and the flower beds would be thistle patches. Well folks, I could go on and on.

Without people who profess their faith in Jesus by putting their faith into action, this church would end up like the one “three blocks down on the right” - boarded up, abandoned, crumbling, derelict and empty. Or it would be converted into apartments, or turned into a music hall, or a museum, or a movie theater, or something else, but it would not be a church. The only reason that we can call this place a “church” is because we have people who have faith in Jesus Christ who step up and put their faith into action in service to the church, and thereby glorify God through their work.

James makes the case that our faith, without actions or deeds to demonstrate that faith, is dead. And so is any church without active, supporting, contributing, serving and reaching out members showing their faith to the rest of the world by how they have God in their lives as they commit to following Jesus' example. If you're not active in the life of this congregation, but call yourselves members, what does that really say about your faith? Is there really faith there? Some folks claim to have an active membership in the life of a congregation, yet they do not attend more than a few times a year, and they only give a few dollars during that same time period. Is that really an active membership? James would say that their faith is dead.

The same thing goes with faith in Jesus Christ. We may claim to be faithful followers of Jesus, but never read the Bible, or never go to church, or never support the life of the church, or even pray. **How can we be called Christians if there is nothing in our lives that demonstrates that we do anything for Jesus Christ? A simple profession of faith in Jesus does not make us a follower of Jesus! There has to be something in us that wants to follow the teachings of Jesus in the way that we live.** If we don't know the teachings of Jesus, or we reject the teachings of Jesus, what gives us the idea that we are followers of Jesus? A follower of Jesus must actively be doing what Jesus tells us to do.

James tells us that unless our life shows that we are living according to the teachings of the Bible, that we follow the example of Jesus' life in our own life, what we profess as faith in Jesus is worthless. It cannot save us. To find salvation in Jesus Christ, we have to believe in Jesus, receive Him as our Savior and Lord, and then we have to live our life in accordance to what Jesus teaches. Just saying that we believe in Jesus does not bring salvation to us.

James lifts this up, too. He says, "*You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that - and shudder*" (Ja. 2:19). This takes us back to Deuteronomy 6:4, "*Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.*" This is called the Shema, and it is one of the basic truths of Jewish orthodoxy. But merely stating that God is One does not make us a follower. Even the demons, those fallen angels who rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven with Satan, know that God is the Supreme God having Ultimate Authority over all things. Yet they shudder at knowing their fate because they have rebelled against Him. They are not His followers, yet they claim this same statement.

No, **the statement of faith is not powerful or worthy without actions following from that person who claims faith in God through Jesus Christ.** Faith by itself has no power, and it is utterly useless to save us because Jesus commanded all His followers to live as His disciples, ones who do as He did. So if we claim to have faith in Jesus, but we do not demonstrate anything in our life that would corroborate that fact, our statement is empty, and our faith in Jesus is really nothing more than words alone. We must accompany our faith with actions showing that we are a follower of Jesus Christ.

Now, there are some people who have loads of deeds, but IS IT because they have faith, or are they just bored and need something to do? Deeds by themselves do not necessarily demonstrate faith in anything. And the deeds we do may not implicate our faith in Jesus Christ, thus the deeds cannot save us apart from faith. The Apostle Paul is very clear in Ephesians 2:8-10 that our deeds by themselves will not save us. He says, *“For it is by grace that you have been saved, through faith - and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”*

So it is not the deeds themselves that save us, but rather our faith in Jesus Christ, given to us by grace, shown out to the world by our deeds done in righteousness so that we might fulfill God’s work for us and thus receive His reward as faithful followers of Jesus.

James then lifts up two people from the Old Testament as examples of faith being lived out in actions. Abraham believed God and prepared Isaac as a sacrifice to the Lord because God commanded it. He had faith that even if he did complete the sacrifice of Isaac, God would resurrect Him, because God had promised that Abraham would be the father of many nations through Isaac. God saw his faithfulness because of what he did according to God’s command. And **God credited Abraham with righteousness because he acted in faith, following God’s command to the fullest**. His actions demonstrated his faith. *“You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did”* (Ja. 2:22). *“...a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone”* (Ja. 2:24).

The second example from the Old Testament is that of Rahab, the prostitute. In Joshua 2:8-13 we read how **Rahab received the spies of Israel into her own home in Jericho, and saved them from capture by the army officials of Jericho**. She saved them and then sent them out to return to Joshua with the report of the city so that they could capture Jericho. Her faith in God move her to risk her own life to protect the spies. Her faith was demonstrated in her actions. James in no way gives approval of Rahab’s former life. It was her faithfulness seen against the background of her previous immorality that

he commends her for her faith. Her faith in God saved her because she acted to protect the spies of Israel. So when all of Jericho was destroyed, Rahab and her family were spared because she put her faith into action. Her faith changed her life as she now lived among the people of Israel.

This gives each one of us hope, for not many of us have been faithful to God enough to be called righteous. But when we hear God's call in our lives, when we believe and receive Jesus as Savior and Lord of our life, and then we demonstrate our faith in the way we live each day, that decision changes our lives and puts us on the road to Salvation because our faith lives in us. Paul tells us, "*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation, the old things are passed away, behold new things have come*" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

James makes one final comment on this issue of faith in this section of Scripture. He says, "*As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead*" (Ja. 2:26). Without our God-given spirit within us, our bodies cease to exist because the Spirit of God is what gives us life. The same is true with faith. If our faith is not acted upon and lived on a daily basis, then that faith is dead as well.

Folks, if you're not demonstrating the faith you have in Jesus through your everyday lives, you have a choice to make; you can either continue to live a dead faith and find no life through Jesus, or you can begin to live your faith and therefore be counted as a faithful servant of the Lord Jesus in all that you do. **Faith alone is useless. It must be accompanied by works done through faith, thereby being counted as righteousness.** Let's pray.

Father, open our eyes today to see ourselves as You see us. Give us the courage to fully evaluate our lives to see if we are truly Your people, putting our faith into action as we do the work You have called us to do. Don't let us be comfortable in just faith alone. Give us the determination to live out our faith so that everyone sees that we have faith by the things we do for You. And give us endurance to keep working for You so that our faith may be counted to us as righteousness. Thank You for loving us and giving us the example of Your Son, Jesus. Help us to live like Jesus in our world today so that others may be drawn to You through us. This we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.