

Living Faith... Proven by action

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Date: 16 June 2024

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[0:00] the Christian faith. As I was thinking about all that, I came across a story about D.L. Moody, and you may not know who D.L. Moody was. In early America, I mean, 1800s, later 1800s, he was an evangelist, a shoe salesman that was led to Christ by his Sunday school teacher, and ended up being one of the greatest evangelists in America, leading hundreds of thousands of people to Christ in the late 1800s in the U.S. and in England and other places. I don't agree with everything that he said, but man, just a great example of personal holiness and godliness and evangelistic zeal. It's hard to beat D.L. Moody. And in this story, it said, there's a little excerpt I just wanted to read. It said, while D.L. Moody was attending a convention in Indianapolis, and that's what caught my attention. I was like, oh, really? In Indianapolis? This is where our convention was. When D.L. Moody was attending a convention in Indianapolis on the topic of mass evangelism, he asked his song leader, Ira Sankey, to meet him at six o'clock one evening at a certain street corner. When Sankey arrived, Mr. Moody asked him to stand on a box and begin to sing.

Once a crowd had gathered, Moody spoke briefly and then invited the people to follow him to the nearby convention hall. Soon the auditorium was filled with spiritually hungry people, and the greatest evangelist preached the gospel to them. Then the crowd of delegates began to arrive for the convention meeting. Moody stopped preaching and said, I'm sorry, but now we must close as the brethren of the convention wished to come and discuss the topic, how to reach the masses. And thus, the uneducated Moody graphically illustrated the difference between talking about something and going out and doing something. I would say to that, there is always, whether it's on a personal level or on the level of a church or a denomination, there is always an abundance of talking, an abundance of it. Talk about prayer, talk about making disciples, we talk about reading our Bibles, we talk about telling others about Christ, but what it amounts to so often, unfortunately too often, is us being nothing but a bunch of phonies. Gathering together, talk, talk, talk, and not doing.

And this is what James is addressing in the passage that we looked at last week and that we're looking at today specifically. It's the idea that it is easier to preach 10 sermons than it is to live one. The reality for us is that we need this word because we need to be reminded of the bridging of this idea of belief and action, belief and obedience. And Lucas did a great job, man. As I listened to the message last week, because we went to an early service, I was able to get on and listen to most of it live. We were driving and so I ended up listening to the rest of it later. But just what a great job as he divided this text into the two groups of the hearers, those that look at themselves, those that forget themselves, those that deceive themselves, and the doers, those that look to Christ, those that stay in Christ, and those that do the work of Christ. And I thought, man, what a beautiful job of dividing the text. Because I had studied it before, he had studied it before, we sat down, we looked at it, and I was like, wow, I did not even see that. What a great division and a great way, because it just springs right out of the text. And I thought to myself, what a contrast. A chasm between belief and practice, between proclamation and action, between saying and doing, between rhetoric and reality.

[4:25] And this difference, as James is describing it, is going to be the difference between life and death. This is the kind of faith, he's saying later, this is the kind of faith that doesn't save.

It's a dead faith. And the contrast is between dead faith and living faith. What does living faith look like? What does it look like when there is faith that's active and live and vibrant? Something that's showing that somebody's been raised up from the grave. Something that's showing that you've been transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. Something that is going to give you the contrast for your own good, so that you're not self-deceived in this. And this is what James is describing. It's the bridge between saying and doing, and it is a will that is surrendered to the word of God. A will that's surrendered in obedience to God, which James describes from the very beginning by saying, this is a letter from James, the servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. And describing himself from the perspective of servant is the mindset of a will that has been surrendered to a master, right? And that's the picture. So let's read the verse together. In fact, let's stand together before I get ahead of myself. Chapter 1, beginning in verse 22, where he says it this way, but be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror, for he looks at himself and goes away and at once forget what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets, but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing. Father, may you bless the reading of your word. May you speak today. May you encourage us as fathers in this room. I pray that you would encourage us to set an example by being doers of the word, mothers, as children, as siblings, as friends, as employees, whatever state we find ourselves in in life. Lord, help us to be this kind of person. We might characterize a living faith that's been changed by Jesus. We pray this all in his name. Amen. Amen. So in the context, James is encouraging us with this living faith.

What does a living faith look like? And he's emphasizing the kind of faith that saves, the kind of faith that works. It's proven by action. And this is exposing this sinister self-deception that we're so susceptible to. So it's just a beautiful picture for us in a very concise way, like James does. It's just filled with wisdom. Every line you can just camp out on. If you memorize the book of James, man, you are going to have at your fingertips unbelievable wisdom from God.

And it's good for us because I think these are the kind of principles we need to think of as we're trying to conform our testimony about our faith in Christ with what we see in Scripture.

That's what we talked about when we talked about our salvation testimony. What is your salvation testimony? How did you come to faith in Christ? And how does that story line up with the examples we see in Scripture? Because that's really all that matters, right? Are y'all with me?

[8:59] If you're with me, say, I am. All right. Just making sure. It's really the reality. All that matters is if my life and my behavior lines up with what I see in the Scripture.

I need to look at these principles because they're going to help me to do a self-examination on what my faith is like. Is my faith a living faith? Is it alive and well? Is it thriving? Is it growing? Is it matching up to what the Scripture says living faith should look like? Or do I even have living faith at all? Do I have real faith in Jesus that's changed me at all? Or are there little troubled areas in my life where I'm struggling to obey and I'm needing repentance? Where I'm needing to say, you know what, it's not just about knowing the truth, but it's about doing the truth.

It's about knowing the truth. It can help you examine your faith, see where you're at. So what principles does James outline that reveal this kind of living faith? And I see four principles in this passage that I think are helpful for us, beginning with the principle of obedience. If you're taking notes, point number one, principle of obedience, living faith acts on God's Word. And notice how he said it, but be doers of the Word and not hearers only. And James is emphasizing to a bunch of believers that are scattered. You remember? The context is this is to scattered believers. These are believers who are enduring persecution, undergoing hardship, and yet there's no excuse for them. And this is helpful for us because we tend to say, man, life's hard. You don't understand. The scripture is so foreign to real life. Man, it just doesn't seem to understand that what I'm going through, right? Like, whoa, it's me.

Jesus, you don't understand my life. God, you don't understand my life. And you hear the kind of questioning of God that you see in the text in James chapter 1. Let not the person say this about God.

The questioning of God. And this test of obedience then is a call for obedience in the hostile settings that you find yourself in. So no matter how hard it is, no matter how difficult it is, it's the same call. There's no exceptions for anybody. The imperative here is that you obey even when it's

difficult.

[11:51] Obedience. God expects us to move beyond hearing and become active doers of the Word. And so you look at the words that he's using. This word doer, it implies active execution.

It's coming from a word that actually, the word was poetes, and it's where you get the word poet. Poetry. You're like, what does that have to do with obedience here?

What does that have to do with doing? Well, it's really interesting because in the context, it's carrying the idea of creativity. Sometimes when you're trying to obey the Word, it requires of you a sense of creativity.

You have to look for ways and think deeply about ways to apply what you're learning. It's not just sometimes very straightforward. Sometimes you're having to try to figure it out.

You're trying to have to think through the Word and go, well, what does this mean in the context of my life? What does it mean to be a doer of the Word in my situation?

[13:02] And you're having to think through it and kind of be a little poetic. To be a little creative, so to speak. You're having to come up with ways to do what he's saying.

That's what obedience is. It's you finding ways and having an inclination to do what you're learning. This is the whole idea of being a disciple, right?

A disciple is a follower of a teacher who's learning the ways of the teacher so that he can do the work of the teacher. This is what it means for you to be a disciple. You're learning God's Word so that you can mimic His ways.

So you can learn His heart. And so you can do His work. You're learning the character of Christ. Apply it to your life so that you can be like Christ.

And then you're doing the work of Christ that He's called you to do. You're to be a doer. A characteristic doer. He's not just saying do the Word. Not just read something and do it.

[14:08] But be the kind of person that reads the Word and is always being creative. Looking for ways that you can do what you're reading. This is who you are in Christ.

This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus. You're calling yourself this. In fact, this is what living faith is. If this isn't part of your life, then you've got some questions for yourself.

If I'm not inclined to obey God's Word, if I'm just inclined to do my own thing, and even when I hear God's Word, I just resist it, or even when I study God's Word, I'm learning it, and oh, I'm so excited about it, and I get these truths in my head, and it's all so good, and then I walk away and I don't do anything about it, it's saying something about your faith.

Is this a living faith or is this a dead faith? Are there signs of life? We've got babies in the room, we've got signs of life, don't we?

We hear it, we hear those amens, those cries. Signs of life. The word implies somebody putting forth their fullest creative abilities to achieve something.

[15:29] It's in the imperative, the present imperative, calling for someone to keep on becoming this. So it's a doer. Keep on becoming a doer.

This is your mindset as a believer. This is a principle of living faith. This is what your response looks like to the wisdom of God when God reveals His wisdom and His Word and shows you what to do.

You are to be the creative doer and act in obedience. James 4.17, later he's going to say this same thing. This is a theme that he's running with through the whole epistle.

In James 4.17 he says, And so, whoever knows to do the right thing and fails to do it, for him this is sin. You know, but you don't do.

So this is not just the sins of commission, like I did something wrong, I stole something, I did something wrong, I acted and did something wrong. This is the passive side of sin.

[16:31] I knew to do something and I didn't do it, and this is sin. And so he's showing you, you want to know what living faith looks like? You want to see vibrance in faith?

You want to see God at work in a transformed life? Not just doing, but be a doer. Now I think of this, I've had people at places that I've worked where somebody that wasn't under my responsibility, you know, didn't work.

Okay, so they were the kind of person, they show up, never got anything done. And I remember one particular case, looking back years and years ago, at somebody that, that they would come 30 minutes late every day.

I mean, they were on kind of a salary scale, pay. So they came 30 minutes late every day. They left 30 minutes early every day.

And I don't know what they did in between. I mean, literally, I have no idea what they did in between. And I just thought about it, and it just ate me up. They weren't under my responsibility, but I would talk to a supervisor about them and say, hey, man, this is an issue.

[17:44] Well, let's just be gracious. And I added it up. That person worked for 30 years. Every day, 30 minutes late, every day leaving 30 minutes early, and I calculated it.

Based on their hourly wage, they had stolen \$25,000 from that place. And I heard this, I remember this even talking to Chandler as Chandler, you know, he's managing that Panda Express, and he's doing such a great job with leadership and guiding and leading people.

And one of the things that he said to his employees, something that he's learned along the way, somewhere in his training, it was this phrase, if you're standing, you're stealing.

And so when an employee might be just standing there doing nothing, he might remind them, hey, just keep, remember, if you're standing, the company's paying you to work, and if you're standing, you're stealing.

I thought, man, what a, what a, even secular business understands this, right? I mean, why is it in our mind as believers, as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, we get in our head that somehow we are exempt from service, right?

[19:07] But that's for somebody else to do. That obedience is somebody else's role. I'm going to hear, I'm going to be entertained, I love a good sermon, I love when the preacher gets excited and dances around and makes funny voices and this and that, and it's awesome, but when it comes time to serve, so often there is a disconnect.

The test of obedience is not when things are easy and when you agree with God. The test is when things are difficult and when you're questioning God. This is the whole context.

Things are difficult, they're in persecution. You're questioning God. Why would God tempt me in this or that? You're questioning, things aren't good and you're saying, well, should I obey God or not?

James is saying, this is what living faith looks like. It's obedience. Living faith obeys the word of God.

God, that's the sign of life. That's the sign of vitality in you. And Jesus was not unclear on this.

When you look to the Gospels in Luke chapter 6, he said this over and over again.

[20:22] It's amazing when you hear that phrase echoing again and again, Luke 6, 46. Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I tell you to do?

Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like. He is like a man building a house who dug deep, laid the foundation on the rock and when the flood arose, the stream broke against that house and it could not shake it because it had been well built. The doer of the word. The contrast between knowing and doing. Luke 11, Jesus said, blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.

Blessed are they. Luke 8, 15. As for the good soil, they are the ones who, hearing the word, hold fast to it in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience.

Luke 12, 47. And the servant knew his master's will and did not get ready or act according to his will. He will receive a severe beating, but the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating.

[21:30] Everyone to whom much is given, much will be required for from him to whom, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand more.

What have we been given? Eternal life. The Holy Spirit of God. His word. Power. Strength.

Endurance. All through the Holy Spirit.

All through the person and the work of Christ. Even the disciples come to Jesus and they say in Luke 8, 21, Jesus, your family's outside. They're calling for you in his response.

But he answered them, my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it. Obedience.

Reading your, on your scripture reading plan, listening to preaching. Sometimes you might be tempted to stop at knowing. You may have an appreciation for the word.

[22:38] You may have affection for the word. You may be swept up in your love for God's word. Maybe you even have enough to argue your points in theological things.

And it's giving you a sense of personal strength in that. The reality is, as one person said, too many believers mark their Bibles but fail to allow their Bibles to mark them.

Knowing is not doing. There is a difference. It's easier to say what we believe than it is to be what we believe.

And God has called us to be this. So this is a principle. Living faith is strengthened by God's word. And this is what James is getting at here in verse 20, the end of verse 22.

Being doers of the word, not hearers only or hearers alone. Deceiving yourselves. So this idea of deception.

[23:49] Integrity here, I'm thinking of integrity as being a strength that you can trust. Right? When I say integrity, there may be different shades of meaning to that word, but when I'm using it here, I'm just saying it in terms of a strength that you can trust.

This is the principle of integrity. Living faith is strengthened by God's word. He uses the word deceiving here, which means to mislead or delude.

It literally, as I was looking this word up, it literally means to be beside the point of something, to misjudge, to miscalculate. It pictures a skewered logic.

It means to reckon something wrong, to do your calculations wrongly and come up with an answer. It means to reason falsely.

It means to be deceived by false reasoning. You're off. Your thinking is off. Your reasoning is off, and that's the idea. And it highlights kind of a sense of false security for us.

[25:02] You've reasoned off, you've reckoned off, and yet you're resting in those figures. Like if someone was to work with Aaron on their finances and they're trying to reckon their retirement, or with Lucas, or with John, they come to you and they're trying to figure out what their retirement's going to look like.

So they're trying to calculate. And some of them have reckoned wrongly, right? And they're merely going toward retirement, and they get there and realize, I don't have enough money to retire.

I've reckoned, and I've got this false sense of security along with it that I've carried these years, and now all of a sudden I'm confronted with this. This is what James is saying about the Word.

Some of you can go along with a false sense of security, thinking because you know the Word, it's the same as doing the Word. And it's not.

As one scholar, as I was reading through, Douglas Moo wrote it this way. He said, the idea of deceive in these contexts is clear. To be deceived is to be blinded to the reality of one's true religious state.

[26:12] People can think they are right with God when they're really not. And so it is for those people who hear the Word, regular church attenders, seminary students, and even seminary professors, but do not do the Word.

They are mistaken in thinking that they are truly right with God, for God's Word cannot be divided into parts. If one wants the benefits of saving power, one must also embrace it as a guide for their life.

It must be applied. It doesn't matter if you're the seminary professor or the pastor or elder or anybody else. It doesn't matter. There is a bridge that needs to be made between believing and doing.

Integrity is the issue. It's the trustworthiness of strength. Like when you're trusting something, you walk into a building and you're trusting the integrity of this structure.

Is it strong enough to hold this thing up? I'm doing work and I put tile down and I've got to check the floor. The floorboards look good.

[27:23] Everything seems solid. But I've got to put this backer board down just to ensure that that floor doesn't move. Because when I put the tile on there and I put that layer of mortar and put the tile on, if that floor moves, what happens?

It cracks. And so it's speaking to the integrity of the floor. Is it strong enough so that it doesn't move under the weight?

We put some stuff in the back of one of our vehicles, some floor tile, some flooring vinyl. And it's heavy. And you don't realize how heavy this is until you start putting it in there and all these boxes are in there and it's like, you look at the car and it's sagging down.

It's an SUV. It should be able to hold stuff, right? But you look at it and all of a sudden the back tires are kind of like this. And it's dragging the ground and it can't handle the weight of this.

Integrity. Too long on that and what will happen is all the suspension parts will wear very quickly and they'll break and things will happen.

[28:34] The tires won't last. The tires aren't made for that kind of weight. It doesn't have the integrity to hold this. So when testing comes, when trials come, this is the issue of integrity.

Is my faith able to hold these things up? Or am I destroyed every time I turn around? Because what I thought was strength wasn't strength.

John MacArthur talks about this word hearing and he said, it's a term to describe students who audit a class. An auditor usually listens to lectures but is permitted to treat assignments and exams as optional.

You audit a class. So I looked into that one time. I was looking into further study and I talked to the school about some further study and they said, well, you can audit a class.

you can go to the class, you can listen to the lectures, you can get the same books, you can do whatever assignments. And I thought, man, what a great plan.

[29:54] That's awesome. And they said, but you don't get any credit for it. You're just auditing the class. So you can do the assignments or not do the assignments.

You can do the test or not take the test. You can go, show up for the test, take it, just see how you do. You can read the assignments or you can say, I didn't feel like reading this week. I'll just show up for the lecture. You can come and go.

You know, do you see what James is getting at here? Are you an auditor of the word? Or are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? Are you just auditing the class?

Like, I can do what I want and I come and go and I'm not committed to the purpose of the church as God has called us together and the work of the saints. I'm just an auditor here.

I'm just going to show and go. James says, oh, beware, brother, sister. For an auditor, that's not living faith.

[31:03] 1 John 1, 6, John said, if we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in darkness, we lie and do not live the truth. In other words, we have no integrity.

There's no strength to be trusted. Matthew 23, 3, Jesus said, so do and observe what they tell you, the Pharisees. They're telling you some things.

Listen to what they're telling you. But he said, but do not, but not the works that they do for they preach, but they don't practice. In other words, they don't have any integrity.

No integrity. Somebody might say, well, yeah, I'm bitter towards church because I knew, I loved the pastor at this church and he had an affair on his wife and he had been living a lie the whole time. He'd been cheating on his wife this whole time.