

It Does Not Stand By Itself

September 16, 2018

James 2:14-17

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Today's Scripture is another lesson, among many, on the necessity of putting your faith into action. The Scripture is very strong language that indicates faith by itself, without action, is dead. If you have no outreach or no benevolence, if you do not respond to the teachings of Jesus, if you refuse to answer the call, if you are not active in missions, then your faith is dead. This is very strong language and this is a lesson for us all. Action is mandatory for Christian faith because the Scripture tells us so. The Bible provides instructions on the things to do and the action to take. There are numerous lessons. Off of the top of my head I came up with maybe a dozen examples; do unto others as you would have them do unto you, turn the other cheek, honor the Sabbath, tithe, help those in need, love your enemies, clothe the naked, do good to those who hate you, feed the hungry, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you, do not judge, visit those in prison, give and do not ask for it back. The list goes on, and on, and on. If we took the time we could cite many, many more. But we cannot remember them all and we cannot possibly do them all. But what we can do is live by the ruling principle which is a matter of devotion. When we have a public confession of faith, we also make a promise of a changed life, a new life that is dedicated to the Lord. If you do not live your life as a changed being, as a person that has surrendered, then you lied - you broke your vow.

I ask you to have a vision with me if you will. Have a vision of the time when you get to heaven. This is when you have your one on one encounter with Jesus. There you are; your time has come. You see Jesus and you proudly announce "I am a believer." Now imagine this scenario. What if Jesus says to you "I did not see it. I saw you in worship but I didn't see you in service. Let that sink in for a minute. I saw you in worship but I did not see you in service. I needed to see evidence of your faith because if you are a believer there will be evidence of this." What if Jesus asks "Where is your prison ministry? OK you don't want to do prison ministry, you don't have to, there are other ways you can serve. How about your clothing ministry? Oh this is starting to get serious, surely you did something for the homeless?" These are easy ones we haven't covered tougher commandments like forgiveness or loving your enemies.

Make sure you live your life so that you look forward to your encounter with Jesus because you have not only confessed that you believe in him but you have shown your faith by how you respond to his word. Yes the Scripture today is tough. But it is God's way. God provides direction to us through the Bible. Today's Scripture teaches us that faith does not stand by itself. Like I said before, we can live by a guiding principle. When you live by your faith and your commitment then doing what is right becomes instinctive.

I am going to point out some basic attitudes to serving. There are those who simply will not serve. They refuse to serve. They do not do what Scripture says to do. They do not answer the call. They say "no" because their world view is on the self. So, they reject the call from God. They say no to the Lord and deny the Lord. These are the ones that the Scripture is addressing. Then there is the reluctant servant. This person says "yes" but serves out of obligation. He or she does not really want to serve and feels like it is a duty. There is the willing servant that wants to serve the Lord and says "yes" when called. He or she does what is required to do but they are not

proactive. They do not look for ways to serve, they take what comes along but does not do anything extra, does not fill in the gaps as they present themselves. Then there is the few that enjoy serving. These people appreciate God's blessings and grace and truly love the Lord. They look forward to serving and enjoy it. They find ministry uplifting and spiritually nurturing. They also receive internal and everlasting gratification. They live a life of joy that is focused on their commitment to the Lord and look for ways and find ways to serve the Lord.

The Scripture today uses one example of putting faith into action. If someone is in need of clothing or food and you say "God bless you ...peace be with you ... praise be to God" But you do nothing to help with the need then the harsh reality is that your faith is dead. Faith does not stand by itself. Failure to respond to a need that exists is a failure to respond to faith. Your faith requires a proactive response to find ways to serve the needs of others. Faith does not stand by itself.

In regards to faith I think today's society is unbalanced. There is more preaching about sin than grace. More emphasis is put on building up attendance or serving the institution than on doing missions. There is not enough effort on putting faith into action. The church is to be a missionary society. Do you know the official name of the region? It is *The Virginia Christian Missionary Society*. The church is a community of a mission. Jesus calls us to reach out - in service - to the marginalized - those in need. In Today's Scripture clothing and food are the examples but the call is to anyone that is in need.

I had a proud moment this week when someone called looking for food and I was able to tell them that we have a box that is available 24 hours a day and they could come and take what is needed. We are recipients of God's grace. We are to respond to God's grace. Faith requires action, it does not stand by itself.