

Faith That Works

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon teaches that genuine faith is evidenced by works and obedience to God's commands.

Duration: 38:44

Topics: "Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of having true faith that is accompanied by works. He distinguishes between different types of faith, including intellectual assent, emotional response, and heart faith. The preacher uses the example of the fig tree to illustrate the concept of a profession without substance. He concludes by urging the congregation to have a singular focus on God and to find their sufficiency in Him. The sermon is based on James 2:17, which states that faith without works is dead.

Transcript

Jim, just a question, Jim Irwin. Do we still have any of the envelope boxes left? About 15 boxes. 15 boxes.

If you do not have a box of offering envelopes, please see Jim Irwin. I think there's an excellent way of helping us in our stewardship responsibility, and I'm delighted that they've come. We're just trusting and believing God that as we prove him.

You know, isn't it interesting? When the Lord Jesus was on the pinnacle of the temple, and he was tempted to cast himself down, he said, thou shalt not test or tempt, prove the Lord thy God. But in Malachi 3.10, he says, prove, test me now, and see if I will not bless you. And I'm having great delight, and I trust you will, in just doing that, because that's the invitation he gave us.

The only time he ever gave that invitation to test him and see if he would do what he had promised. So since he invited it, don't you think we ought to do it? Prove me now, bring you all the tithes into the storehouse, and see if I won't bless you. Prove me, test me.

Oh, I think we should. Secondly, I'm going to ask for prayer. Andrew Weil came unexpectedly this week.

I got back from Flint, Michigan, where I had an excellent time in the seminar, speaking seven hours on my feet from Friday night till Sunday afternoon. Without notes, from my heart, to a group of 150 people who paid for the privilege of being there in the seminar. Oh, it was great.

And I was one of two speakers, and the other man spoke eight hours. So you can imagine those folks got their money's worth, didn't they? Well, when I got back, I had a call from a dear friend of many, many years, since 1945, when we reached Milute in Upper Nile Province on the White Nile, and one of the students at the school was Andrew Weil. And then he went to another and came back.

He finished in the spring of that season, came back. Thirty years later, I was in the office of the Minister of State for Presidential Affairs in the palace, in Khartoum, President's Palace, and I was meeting there with another man from Khartoum, who took me to see this very necessary and important man. And after we finished our meeting, he said, Have you ever lived in the Sudan? Yes.

Where? Upper Nile Province. Where in Upper Nile Province? Milute. And he said, Mr. Reidhead.

He remembered my name after 30 years. And it's been a delightful time of fellowship with him in these years since then, these ten years since we met. He's been here.

He finished two years of work in one year at Wheaton College on a special tutorial program as his master's degree in international development from American University, his honorary doctorate from Wheaton College, and is the president of the Sanu Party in the Sudan, one of the parties that has bridged all gaps, is accepted in the South and the North because of what it stands for and because of Andrew's character. Now, he's here on very important business. We've been talking almost day and night, but not really.

We're on breaks now and then. But I'm going to ask you to become a prayer force for us. Sometime each day, will you pray that the reasons for Andrew's coming will be realized for the glory of God, for the good of the country? And pray with us.

Hold up our hands. Stand against every foe that would interfere and just become a prayer support because the matters being discussed are of very great importance for that country that's seen so much of martyrs' blood and missionaries' life poured out in the church and is standing in such great need of the blessing that can come and the dangers that can be averted. So I'm asking you to hold up our hands in prayer as this week especially we will be having discussions that are of great significance.

Just pray. The Lord grant that the purpose for Andrew's coming will be realized and stand against everything that would interfere with their being realized. Would you like that, Andrew, from this people? Would you like to have this people also pray for us? And we will ask them to do it.

Thank you so much. Now, to the text of the morning, verse 17. You've already heard it read, Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, and being alone.

We've been talking about faith for several weeks now, in fact, two or three months. And I think this is the most appropriate time for us to have a little review. Let's go back.

Some of you weren't here, so it's necessary for me to tell those who were not here. Those of you who were may not have recalled it in full detail, so I don't think that it will be amiss. There are several kinds of faith that we should see.

Remember Romans 10, 9, and 10. That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth, Jesus to be Lord, and believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.

Now, that is a particular kind of faith. But there are other kinds of faith. One of the questions that confronts all of us, in the light of the provision that God has made for answered prayer, in the light of the fact that God has performed so many miracles, in the light of the fact that there are so many that are not healed or so many prayers that seemingly are not answered in the way that is expected and requested, we have to ask why.

It's a why that confronts everyone. We don't have the answer, but there are answers in the form of truth. So the question, why? Well, let's go to another one.

It's a little bit less tricky, but more subtle and more dangerous. You know, there's an old saying, everybody talking about heaven ain't going there. If you read Matthew in the Sermon on the Mount, you will discover in that seventh chapter a very, very interesting thing.

Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, didn't we cast out devils in your name and do miracles in your name? And I will say, you didn't cast out devils or do miracles. No, he didn't say that. He didn't challenge the fact that they'd done it.

He said, and I will say unto you, away with you, I never knew you. They knew him and they used him, but he didn't know them. I never ask anyone anymore, do you know the Lord? Because a lot of people know the Lord, whom apparently from that scripture he doesn't know.

I ask the question this way, when did you first realize that the Lord knew you and received you and gave you his assurance that you'd been born of God? Because you see, that puts the shoe on the foot where it belongs. Not when did you know him, but when did you know that he knew you? When did you have his witness in your heart that you'd been born again? Because that's the key issue. Then he said, some men built their house on the same floor plan, two men.

One, they both had the same floor plan, same elevation, all was identical, except one built on sand and another built on rock. The floor plan, the house plan is the plan of salvation. The sand, that's something else.

The rock is a relationship to Christ. So what we're finding is that there are different kinds of faith and it's awful easy to assume that everybody that claims to believe in Christ is going to make it to heaven, but the scripture doesn't tell us that. In fact, John Bunyan in his marvelous book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, gives us a very, very interesting statement.

Now you remember in *John Pilgrim's Progress*, you had the city of destruction, which was where a great many people lived and where they died, and there was no question about their destination. They were doomed. But John Bunyan says, there's Mr. Professing Christian, and Mr. Professing Christian has an easy time of it.

He never gets into the slough of despond. He never is attacked on the way. He just sails through and he comes to the river, and instead of his having a big time getting over the river, he just crosses it with no problem.

And he comes up to the gate of the city. But instead of the gates being open, the angels standing on the gate towers, guarding the gate, look down and say, whence come you and who are you? And he said, why I, I am Mr. Professing Christian. I've been serving the Lord of this place.

I've known him all for years. Go to him and tell him that I've come. Well, we haven't any word of your coming, and normally when one crosses the river, we expect he will be received, but of you, we've heard nothing.

But go, I say, and talk to the Lord of the place, and he will open the gate and have me to him. And so came they and said, there stands one at the gate who professes to know you, that he's served you, that he's performed miracles in your name and cast out devils in your name. But we do not have his name.

What shall we do with him? And the Lord of the place, so wrote Bunyan, with tears in his eyes said, bind him hand and foot and have him away and cast him into the lake of fire. So said John Bunyan, I saw him. The angels came, they did as the Lord had instructed.

They bound him and they carried him back across the river to the mountain where a hole opened in the side of the mountain and they placed him in and I did see that he went from there into the lake of fire and said, Bunyan, and I perceive there is a way to hell from the gates of heaven as well as from the city of destruction. Well, John Bunyan hasn't been terribly popular in the last 50, 60 years. There haven't been a great many people that have gone into ecstasies of joy and rejoicing because he wrote the truth.

Truth that sometimes we would rather were silence. What's he talking about? He's talking about different kinds of faith. I've located four.

The first kind of faith that I've encountered frequently in these 40, nearly 50 years of ministry is what I call head faith. It's an intellectual assent to what is written. It's an agreement of the mind with what's printed on the page or what's taught in the air.

The multitudes there are who have intellectually assented to what's been stated and have presumed from that intellectual agreement that they are right with God. There is a second kind of faith and I call it dead faith. Dead faith is an appropriation of ritual, of rites and ceremonies and taboos.

I saw a great deal of that in the Sudan among my Mohammedan friends who prayed five times every day beginning early in the morning, who gave 2% of all their possessions every year, who fasted one month out of the year, neither eating nor drinking nor so much as swallowing their spittle. I saw them as they would laboriously and with great cost and often enormous suffering make their pilgrimage to Mecca, sometimes being 20, 30 years. The cook at our mission home had been 40 years from the time he had left Nigeria on his pilgrimage and he was just returning in the truck with those driving across Africa to Ghana, going home after 40 years of pilgrimage.

And I said to Saeed as he came to the door of our room to bid us goodbye, Saeed, do you have peace with God knowing that if you were to die on this trip you would be in His presence? No. Do you know the Lord in your own heart? No. Do you have the assurance? No.

I have prayed, I have given, I have fasted, I have made my pilgrimage, but I have no more peace with God now than when I left my village 40 years ago. Rites, ritual, taboo? Is Muhammad living in your heart, Saeed? Is God? No. God is there, Muhammad is buried in the Kaaba.

I am alone, hoping that Muhammad will help me when I die. A dead faith. Then I have found a third kind of faith.

It's a devil's faith. We read about it here, it's been given to us, it said that the devils, the demons, believe and they tremble. That's an emotional response to the horrors of hell on the one hand and the beauties of heaven on the other.

But still, it's but an emotional response to these realities. There are many that would certainly eschew hell and certainly would gain heaven and who emotionally are satisfied that they have succeeded in the first and in the second. But all they have is, as the demons, an emotional response.

Then there is the fourth kind, the kind I mentioned earlier at the beginning when I said, with a heart, man believeth unto righteousness. Now that's the faith, that's the faith of which we speak when James is saying, faith that works, real faith, that's not just an intellectual assent, not just an appropriation of rites, rituals, and taboos, not just an emotional response, but heart faith, real faith, results in obedience. Now you know that creed without compassion is empty.

The illustration that God uses here is a very telling one. You remember what happened when the Lord Jesus came to the fig tree? We talked about that a while ago. The fig tree had a profession.

The way figs grow is this, that the blossoms come and the figs form and then the leaves come. Now we've seen trees out here, haven't we, that have put out blossoms before they put out leaves. Well, so have the figs.

The figs form from the blossoms and then the leaves come and when the leaves are there, the testimony, the profession, the declaration is, come and eat, I've got fruit for you. And in this case, the Lord went and the tree was empty and he spoke to it, said I'll never bear fruit again, and it died. It had a creed that was without reality, without compassion.

In contrast to that, remember, the Samaritan, whose theology was quite incorrect, who didn't understand Revelation, but on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho, he went by the one the scribe had looked at and said, be healed, be well, be cared for, and the priest had said, oh, I'm so sorry, come to church next Sunday, we'll tell you how to avoid ditches. And the Samaritan went down and identified himself with the need. He took the wine, which was their local disinfectant, because the alcohol content, 12%, was enough to sterilize most wounds, and he washed out the wounds, and then he poured in the olive oil, which would act as a healing emolument, and he bound him up, and he put him on his donkey, and he carried him to that still standing or reconstructed for my sake and yours on the spot, the inn of the good Samaritan, and he said, now I've got to go to Jericho, and I want you to take care of him, give him food and water, and anything you do for him, I'll repay you when I come back.

Now, there was a man who the Lord commended, because he had shown compassion. That's the practical meaning of works. The fig tree had lots of leaves, no fruit.

The Samaritan didn't have any theology worth speaking of, but in contrast, he was described as, and has been since, as the good Samaritan. Not nice words alone. Oh, words are fine, as long as they are accompanied by practical deeds, deeds that are going to make the words have dimension of reality.

Now, faith always, always requires works. We sang it, a little coin, heads, tails, if you wish to call it, but I think of it as trust on one side, obey on the other, and you can no more have faith without works and obedience than you can have a coin with one side on it. There is no such thing as a one-sided coin.

Look, it has to have a back dimension to it. Faith must have obedience. Case in point, Abraham is called the father of them that believe, the father of the believers.

Why? Abraham was an Assyrian. I've met some Assyrians. They're very interesting people.

Few of them left. I find one was up in Flint, Michigan, and others elsewhere. Assyrians.

See, that's what Abraham was. He wasn't a Jew. There weren't any at that time.

Did you know that? Well, he was a descendant of Shem. He was a Shem, but so were the rest of the Assyrians, too. And this Assyrian down there in Ur called Abram, without the other vowel in it, Abram, one day was walking in the field, and God talked to him.

God spoke to him. And God said, Abram, get up from your father's house and from your country and from your kindred, and you go into a land that I will show you, and I will make of you a great nation. Now, friend, somebody comes to you and says, I was walking in the field last night and God spoke to me.

His buttons are a little loose. His seams are coming out. You've got to watch that guy.

God's talking to him. Well, I'll tell you something. It never has been popular to hear from God.

Because did you know that the reasons that the Pharisees crucified Christ was because he had something they didn't have? And when they found out that he had something they didn't have, they either had to seek it or kill him. That's why God said, get up, Abram, and leave, because Abram could not live in that community any longer. And he did it, but he had to accede to the heat from the kitchen, so his wife said, well, I want to take my dad with me.

So they got up to Haran, and there they had to camp until the old man died. I mean, until Haran, until he was dead. And he couldn't move on into the plan and purpose of God until he had really come to the place of obedience.

And here he is. Oh, dear friends. What's he doing? He is doing what God told him to do.

And how long did he wait? How long did Abram wait for that child from which this nation was going to come? Well, he was 75. Sarah was 65 when God spoke to him. He was 100, and she was 90 when Isaac was born.

25 years. That's quite a while, isn't it? The trial of your faith being more. Aren't you glad God chose Abram instead of Gideon? The old Gideon, bless his heart, has to put the fleece out and get it wet and get it dry, get it wet and dry, wring it out until the hair comes loose from the skin trying to prove God.

God spoke to Abraham, and Abraham obeyed God and trusted him for 25 years. And he never deviated. That's why he's called the father of the faithful.

Because his faith was accompanied by works. Now, I want you to go with me. I want you to see that old man when God speaks to him.

Now he's about 116, and his son Isaac has grown, and he's a stalwart young man who's 16. And he's still talking to God, and God's still talking to him. And God says to Abraham, that's his name now, Abraham, I want you to get up and take your son Isaac and go to the mountain I'll show you and sacrifice your son.

Now remember, Abraham obeyed God and Abraham believed God. And so what he did was to say, Son, God's called us to make a sacrifice. And he got the donkey, and he put some wood on it, put their camping stuff on it, and he started out.

Now, if he had wanted to, he could have left early in the morning and gotten to the place that God had appointed him, made the sacrifice, and come back that afternoon. Now, he could have done that. I don't fault him, and neither did God, because instead of going southwest, he went southeast.

He went this way, giving himself a chance to adjust to what God had asked, and a little more time with Isaac, and they camped one night, and they camped the next night, and the third day they came to the mount that he could have gotten in a half a day, but he had two and a half, three days more with Isaac. And they started up. They took the wood off of the donkey's back.

He said, Here, Isaac, you carry this. And he took a pot of fire that was there with the coals, and he had his knife on his belt with a sash around it. And they started up, and Isaac said, But Father, we have the wood, and we have the fire, and you have your knife, but where is the offering? And there was a revelation that came from God, and a name of God.

They that know thy name put their trust in thee, for thou shalt not forsake them that seek thee. And all Abraham said was, Jehovah Jireh, the Lord will provide. Jehovah Jireh, the Lord our provider.

And he said to the servants, You wait here, and, now listen, and we will come again to you. We, I and my son, we will come again, because Abraham had resurrection faith in Jehovah Jireh. Abraham believed God would provide.

And so Abraham took his son, bound his son, laid him down, raised his knife, started down, and God, Abraham, obeyed God. And there was a ram that they hadn't seen before caught in the thicket. Now, Abraham tells us there are two sides.

There's heart faith. With a heart man believeth. Not just with a head, not just in duties, not just in emotion, but heart faith.

And Abraham had heart faith. Rahab had heart faith. That's what James is talking about.

The kind of faith that obeys, that that obedience affirms the faith to be real and genuine. Now, there's no conflict, in the word of God, between faith and works. No conflict between Paul and James at all.

None whatsoever. Paul emphasized faith. Peter, in his epistles, emphasized hope, the hope of his coming.

And John emphasized love. There's no conflict. Now, James is the result of the synthesis of these three.

Operative faith, purifying hope, and constraining love. These three together meld into faith that works. That kind of faith, we are told, isn't light, isn't cheap, but works.

That's the faith that comes by hearing. Hearing the word of God, deep within the heart, tested, waited upon, knowing that this is what God has said. Not something that you've talked someone into, not something that someone has been quickly persuaded to believe, but a faith that's within.

And I believe that that faith God always honors. That's the kind of faith I seek to cultivate. I want you to cultivate.

I want us to demonstrate in our lives, in our homes, in the life of the church, and in the community, faith that works. Not whopped up, not pressed down, not just the result of emotional enthusiasm, but a faith that has its roots in the nature of God, in the character of God, in the reality of relationship to God. Faith that's going to result in changed lives, in answered prayer, in living, walking miracles.

Sermons with shoe leather, in shoe leather, that make their way through the community, demonstrating the reality that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and forever. I don't know that we will ever find the answer. Why? All prayer isn't answered.

Everyone isn't healed. All the miracles we need aren't received. I don't know if we'll ever find all the answer, but friend, this is one part of it.

Real faith, heart faith. God make it real in us. Father in heaven, in the name of the Lord Jesus, this morning, we thank you and we praise you for what our eyes have seen, what our ears have heard, what our hearts have felt.

The miracles that we've seen in answered prayer, the tremendous triumphs of thy grace, and the victories of thy love, and the demonstration of thy power. Oh, how we long to see it, Father, in our lives, and in the lives of those around us, and in the life of this body of believers. May it be faith that works, heart faith, based on the word of God, and on the relationship to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

To that end, move upon us, and move through us to the benefit of those that are caught, lying bruised and bleeding in the ditches all around us, who wait for us to minister to them in behalf of the Lord Jesus Christ, thus demonstrating our faith and his power. In the worthy name of the Lamb that was slain, we ask it. Amen.

There is also one Old Testament character that was not mentioned in the sermon this morning that waited 45 years for his faith to find its fulfillment. None other than Caleb. And he trusted the Lord when everybody else failed.

Number 362. 362. Let's stand together as we sing.

Others saw the giant, Caleb saw the Lord. They were sore disheartened, he believed God's word. And that word he fully, fearlessly obeyed.

Was it not sufficient that the Lord hath said, I will never leave thee, go in this thy might. One shall chase a thousand to put ten to flight. Oh, to follow fully like this one of old.

Oh, to be like Caleb, doing what is told. Then the Lord's rich blessing will be ours today. He will master even those who him obey.

I will never leave thee, go in this thy might. One shall chase a thousand to put ten to flight. If we are half-hearted, we'll not taste.

Those who fully, wholly, will be wholly blessed. Blessed in soul and spirit, body, mind and heart. Rich and heavy treasure which he will impart.

I will never leave thee, go in this thy might. One shall chase a thousand to put ten to flight. Now as you come to verse four, notice, oh, to just have one master, the one who has only one goal in life, according to Dr. Paine, will succeed.

He can get that. Everything else has to be put aside. One goal, only to have one master.

All right. Oh, to have one master, only one to please. Oh, to have one purpose, not our will or ease.

Pressing ever onward to the goal before. Serving gladly, holy him who we adore. I will never leave thee, go in this thy might.

One shall chase a thousand to put ten to flight. And as you think about the characters that were mentioned this morning in the message, and as you begin to think, and I trust that this theme will continue through your mind and heart this day, oh, to just have our faith and trust in that sufficiency of Christ. Shall we pray? Thank you, Heavenly Father, that you have given us illustration after illustration after illustration of men who have put their total confidence in you and have found you to meet them.

And I thank you that there are those this day who can be present examples of those who have totally committed themselves to you. Help us, we pray, as we go our way to only have one purpose, that is to find our sufficiency in you. We ask all these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.

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