

FRIDAY 26 August 2022 "Actions or Words?"

James 2:14-24

Good Friday morning to you my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

An age-old question is this: 'what speaks louder, words or actions?' What do you think? Why? What has been your experience? In America we are in the early stages of the political election season and thus our ears are deluged with politician words. Accusations, promises, blame, excuses and so much of what many people call simply 'jibber jabber'. So, I think a very fair question, in every sphere of life, is this: 'what do you look for in actions that will validate and support the words?' One word really becomes very significant in times like this... INTEGRITY! Would you agree?

Of course, this isn't new and it's not an issue only at times of political elections. This is a fundamental issue in every aspect of life and has been so from the beginning of time. So, let's sit down again in the home of James the apostle, as he is writing a very important letter to Jewish Jesus followers, all across the Roman Empire, in the middle of the first century, about 20 years or so after Jesus has ascended back to heaven.

Have you noticed James is a very straightforward, clear, no-nonsense writer. He has a tendency to speak out loud the words he is writing, do you do that? So, let's listen and watch as James picks up his stylus and writes: ***"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith in God but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ...faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."*** (James 2:14, 17) Oh my, that's powerful, isn't it? But what does it mean?

I'm sure you understand when James uses the phrase ***"brothers and sisters"*** he is not speaking of his siblings, he's talking about spiritual 'brothers and sisters' in the 'family of God'. *One of the unique claims of Christianity is that each person who trusts Jesus Christ to be their Savior is then adopted by God the Father into God's family, as a spiritual son or daughter of God.* Several Scriptures explain that to us including John 1:12,13; Romans 8:14-17; 1 John 3:1-3. I wonder if James, as he both spoke and wrote those words, paused, looking at those in his writing room and asking... 'are you a child of God? Are you sure that God is your heavenly Father?'

Would you allow me to do the same... look YOU right in the eye, my "Walking with Jesus" friend, wherever you are in the world, and ask the same question: *'are you a spiritual son or daughter of Almighty, Holy God, because you have fully trusted in Jesus to be your Savior?'*

In this verse James asked a very powerful question of every Jewish Jesus follower across the Empire: ***"What good is it... if someone claims to have faith in God but has no deeds? Can such faith save them?"***

It's a fundamental question of integrity. James is clearly speaking a powerful truth here: **words are simply words unless the words are validated in your life and mine by our actions!** *In fact, our actions either support and prove the legitimacy of our words or our actions deny and invalidate our words, especially when those words are speaking of our faith in God, our relationship with Jesus, our confidence in God's truth, the Bible.*

James picked up his stylus to continue: **"But someone will say, 'You have faith, I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds and I'll show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that and shudder."** (James 2:18,19) Have you ever thought about what the dark kingdom, the demons, think about Jesus? Why would James write that demons believe in God and shudder? Remember, we have several examples, in the Gospels, of demons who spoke to Jesus through the person they possessed.

In Mark 1:23 we have the description of an encounter between Jesus and a demon possessed man in the Synagogue while Jesus was teaching! Mark writes: **"Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy one of God!'"** Demons are evil angels who have rebelled against and rejected God. *They know Jesus is God the Son and they know He created all angels, according to Colossians 1:15,16, and demons know Jesus has all power to do anything with them including destroy them if He chooses.* James was challenging his readers to ask a fundamental question of themselves: **'what difference does what I believe about Jesus make in my life?'** How do you answer that question, my friends?

Remember, James is writing to Jewish Jesus followers and therefore his next statement is very powerful: **"Do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that Abraham's faith and his actions were working together and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the Scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness, and he was called God's friend.' You see that a person is considered righteous by what they DO and not by FAITH alone!"** (James 2:20-24)

Oh my! James puts down his stylus and looks piercingly at those in the room, then rises and walks again to the window looking out at busy people doing life as normal. **Everyday all of us prove our faith by our actions.** James watched as people handed over money to merchants and received in return goods that they believe will be worth what they have paid. Others shook hands, promising they'd bring the money later, for they didn't have enough in their pocket. Actions based on belief and trust. We live it every day don't we, in almost every aspect of our lives?

But here James was talking about Spiritual faith in God and that our actions legitimize or prove that faith. For the Jewish reader, no story proved this concept more than that of Abraham and Isaac found in Genesis 22.

You remember! Isaac was the miracle son born to Abraham and Sarah when they were 100 and 90 years old respectively, well past normal childbearing age. *They had waited 25 years with great faith that God would do as He promised.* Genesis 15:4-6 is the moment when God saw Abraham's heart and his unwavering faith in God's promise. The record says: ***"Abram believed the LORD, and it was credited to him as righteousness."*** (Gen. 15:6)

Finally, Isaac was born. Some years later God spoke to Abraham, testing his faith with the ultimate challenge. God told Abraham to sacrifice Isaac as the ultimate proof of his love for and obedience to God. Abraham walked three days with his son and at the top of Mount Moriah built an altar, tied up his son Isaac, and was about to sacrifice him when God stopped him, saying ***"Do not lay your hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God because you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son."*** (Gen. 22:12) All Jews understood Abraham had proved his faith and trust in God by his actions of obedience and willingness to do the unthinkable.

Years later the apostle Paul wrote these words of explanation in Romans 4:18-25 ***"Without weakening in his faith Abraham faced the fact that his body was as good as dead, since he was about 100 years old, and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what God had promised! That is why it was credited to him as righteousness!"*** Abraham had proved the authenticity, the depth, the integrity of his faith in God by participating with God both in the conception of Isaac when he was 100 years old, but also by taking that miracle boy to the place of sacrifice, in full obedience to God's instructions, *believing that if God, for some reason, allowed Abraham to kill his son, that God would be faithful to His promises and raise that boy back to life again!*

Now, we need to pause right here for today and ponder **Abraham's profound proof of his faith in God.** I challenge you and me to ask ourselves how we prove, by our actions, the legitimacy and depth of the faith in God we claim... and I'll meet you right back here tomorrow as we continue in this very significant experience with James.

Today's Scripture is James 2:14-24.