

MONDAY 29 August 2022 "Belief / Behavior" (1 John 1:5- 2:2 & James 2:24)

Good Monday morning my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

We human beings welcome affirmation and accolades and symbols which celebrate our accomplishments, don't we? Trophies, diploma's, awards, plaques, ceremonies and applause, certificates of achievement... and so many of them are earned with hard work over a long period of time, right? Most are well deserved. So, of all the symbols of achievement that you've earned, which is most valuable to you and why?

I left you yesterday sitting in a room in Jerusalem, with James, one of the apostles. He's writing the first letter to go out across the Roman Empire to Jesus followers, particularly Jewish Jesus followers. Have you ever thought much about what it was like for these thousands of people who had believed in Jesus in those first few years? Remember, they had no organized church, no Seminary trained Pastor, only the Old Testament of the Bible. No other Christian resources of any kind. They were so hungry to understand this relationship with Almighty, Holy God through faith in Jesus Christ. They longed to understand the theology of Jesus' incarnation and atonement death and resurrection and His ascension back to heaven.

They had so many, many questions... and they longed to experience whatever the Holy Spirit could do in them to break the hold of sin in their lives, cleanse them from their guilt and shame of the past, and help them develop minds and hearts that would lead them in living God honoring lives.

We've watched James write almost two full chapters of Holy Spirit guided truth and instructions to these Jewish Jesus followers, and yet three more chapters of powerful truth will be revealed into his mind by the Holy Spirit. So, let's rejoin James right now. Remember we concluded yesterday with James writing these two powerful, staggering truths: **"God considers a person righteous by what they DO and not by their FAITH alone."** (James 2:24) Oh my! We spent most of yesterday looking at the balance of faith and behavior and understanding that *our behavior is a consistently fair reflection of the reality of what we believe. It is impossible to live with belief and behavior out of sync for very long.*

Therefore, if someone's behavior is contrary to what they claim to believe, then we can fairly conclude they are not being truthful in their belief claim. **You see friends, what we believe in our minds must take root in our heart to be reflected in consistent behavior!** Did you get that? You simply cannot live for long in the conflict of your mind and heart believing opposite things.

The other statement James made yesterday. which was so significant. is this: **"As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."** (James 2:26) We took extended time yesterday to dig deeply into this.

We understand James is, of course, writing primarily with a spiritual focus so when he talks about 'faith' he means faith in God, belief in God's truths, especially as it relates to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the miracles related to our Salvation. James is making the bold statement here in chapter 2 that **BEHAVIOR validates Christian FAITH!** *The authenticity of the work of God in saving a person from their sin condemnation and breaking the stronghold of sin in their life is evidenced by their BEHAVIOR. The evidence of the Holy Spirit alive in a Christian person and guiding that person's mind and heart is seen in their WORDS and their BEHAVIOR.*

So, when you put those two paragraphs together you see the problem don't you, my friends? It's the problem Jewish Jesus followers all across the Roman empire were struggling with. They had been trained and taught since they were infants that it was the LAWS of God, the Commandments and hundreds of other laws which guided their behavior and if they were very, very good at keeping all the laws, then maybe, just maybe God would see them as somewhat righteous. But you and I both know keeping the law is not necessarily a reflection of what you really believe or what's going on in your heart.

Most people keep the laws of their land, so they don't have to deal with the police or jail or long-term prison confinement or other punishments that come with breaking the law. But one of the main themes of Jesus' teaching was that an authentic relationship with God which results in living a God honoring life is NOT about laws and regulations or traditions and religious practices. *It's ALL about a heart rooted love relationship with God and mind which is being renewed by the Spirit of God to help you think, speak and act in ways that honor God...* not because you are afraid of punishment, but because you love God, you are profoundly grateful to Jesus for His atonement death paying for your sin. Do you understand this my friends? It is absolutely fundamental to a true understanding and living a Christian relationship with your Creator, Holy God.

But we closed yesterday, raising the obvious question: None of us is perfect, all of us stumble and sin in thought, word or action from time to time. *When we do, does that mean we are no longer redeemed by the blood of Jesus, we have lost our salvation and we are again doomed to eternity in Hell?*

And what about the person who claims they have trusted Jesus to be their Savior but there is no evidence in their BEHAVIOR of any deep desire to honor Holy God with their life; or there is no apparent sense of conviction when they sin; and finally, there is no apparent desire to repent of their wrongdoing?

Oh my, those are two very, very important life questions and I'm so glad the Holy Spirit led the writers of the Bible to deal with them. We've already heard what James has said, now let's listen to John the beloved disciple, the very close friend of Jesus. Did you know John wrote 5 books in the New Testament? The Gospel of John in which John tells the story of Jesus' life and message from a very personal perspective. Three little letters from John titled 1st, 2nd and 3rd John. And also, the last book of the Bible, the Revelation was written by John.

So, let's hear how John the apostle was led by the Holy Spirit to bring clarity to this **BELIEF / BEHAVIOR** dilemma. In his little letter we call 1st John he wrote these words: *"This is the message we have heard from Jesus and declare to you: God is light [holy] in Him there is no darkness [evil] at all. If we claim to have a relationship with God and yet we walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as He is in the light... the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness..." (1 John 1:5-9)*

Now that's clear, isn't it my friends? *God is holy and perfect, by nature we are not.* But as we repent of our sin and trust in Jesus and what He accomplished on the cross to pay for our sins, God forgives our sin and cleanses, purifies us. God doesn't make us perfect, we are still human, and we still live in a very wicked world which tempts us many times every day to sin, and sometimes even the best of us stumble. When we do NOTHING has changed in the God work He has accomplished in our lives when He forgave our sin, adopted us into His family, placed His Holy Spirit in us and assured us of heaven for eternity. *All of that is safe, secure, unchanging...because God Himself did it all! So, what changes when Christians sin?*

The same thing that happens between you as a parent or grandparent and your children or grandchildren when they do things you have taught them are not right. They disobeyed you, they rebelled against your truth standard and so now there's a tension, a strained relationship because they are in rebellion against you. They are still your kids and grandkids, and you still love them, and they love you, but their rebellion against you has strained the relationship. The only thing that can fix this problem is what? *Their repentance and your forgiveness of them, right? It's exactly the same with God and us!*

This is profoundly important friends. When you and I trust Jesus Christ to be our Savior THEN God does ALL the work He has promised of delivering us from our sin and sin bondage; adopting us into His family; placing His Holy Spirit inside us to guide us and convict us if we sin again. *And if we sin, when we sin, God does NOT undo ANY of the great saving work He has done in us.* What does God do when we sin... the same thing you do when your grandkids sin. In your love, you show them their wrong and you wait for them to agree and repent and then you forgive, and relationship is restored.

Oh, my friends please understand this, it is one of the great and unique truths of our Christian faith. *NO other religious or spiritual system offers this wonderful truth to our human race.* So, let's pause right here and spend some time thanking God about it all...and I'll meet you here again tomorrow to continue our discovery of God's great truths in this **holy balance of BELIEF & BEHAVIOR.**

Today's Scripture is James 2:24; 1 John 1:5-2:2.