

Scripture : James 2:14–26

01/21/2024 Pastor David K Park

Title : “Can we show off our faith?”

I come from a family of ministers. My maternal grandfather started the ministry, followed by my uncles and cousins. But my own family was not so fortunate in terms of Christianity. My grandfather died without believing in Jesus. My grandmother was a devout Buddhist, but when her husband, my grandfather, died before she was 40 years old, she had serious doubts about the religion she belonged to. One day, she had a change of heart: what if she believed in Jesus? She started going to church on her own and eventually accepted Jesus as her Savior. When my grandmother passed away, she was an elder, but many times I saw her weeping over the fact that my grandfather, who had gone before her, had not known Jesus and was not saved. My sorrow when she passed away was unspeakable, but what a legacy she left me. I inherited an invisible legacy of faith. My grandmother's faith is something I would love to boast about. But is that faith really something to boast about? Faith is not something to boast about.

Martin Luther referred to James as an "Epistle of straw". This is because it states the doctrine of salvation by what we do. What Martin Luther was interested in at the time was Paul's doctrine of Justification by Faith. He believed that it was by faith that a person is justified not by what they do. This is still one of the best theology today.

In the Bible, Abraham appears the first as a man of faith. Next comes Moses, representing the law, and then Jesus Christ, the gospel itself. But faith is fascinating in its invisibility. In his book 'Being and Possession', Christian philosopher Gabriel Marcel writes, "Faith corresponds to being, but not to possession." We can distinguish between existence and possession because we have reason. Therefore, if I have a real faith, I cannot boast that my faith is so strong.

We must give obedience to God. If a husband knows that his wife is now pregnant with a child, he can picture the reality of that desire in his mind because he desires a child in his imagination. The baby is still in the womb, but the husband already have a picture of it in his mind as evidence of things not seen. I know that's a very metaphysical example, but for moms-to-be and dads-to-be, it couldn't be more practical.

Is your future uncertain? Is your child's future unclear? What reality do you have about it? What will you hold up as evidence of what you do not see? To picture in your mind the wonderful things God will do with your child – that is a faith. Believing that your own future is so surely with God that if it were to be painted, it would be your favorite color – that's a faith.

In today's text, we read the story of Abraham and Rahab the harlot. Abraham loved his son, Isaac, whom he had at the age of 100, and God tested him and told him to take him to Mount Moriah to offer him as a burnt offering. But without a word of complaint, Abraham got up early the next day and took Isaac with him to Mount Moriah as the order he received from God. As he raised his sword to kill him, God called to him and told him not to proceed any further.

In the second example of one's own faith being justified by works is the case of Rahab the harlot. Rahab was a person whose faith was of a very low and vulgar level and who was pointed out as a sinner. However, her act of welcoming the spies, even at the risk of her life, and letting them go out by another way, was good in the sight of God. This shows that even the most wicked man can be saved by faith when it is evidenced by a beautiful act of faith.

Obedience is what a person of faith can offer to God. Obedience that you only follow if you judge, experience, verify, and prove your philosophy with reason is disobedience. Being thankful when your future is going well, and blaming God when you encounter difficulties and tribulations, is not faith; it is disobedience. Partial obedience, like obeying this and not that, according to your head, is disobedience. Therefore, to have a living faith is a total obedience to God.

We need to live as transformed believers. In verse 20, the Word "vain" is the same as the word "Raca" in the original Greek. In the Bible, 'Raca' is a profanity. It expresses disgust for the kind of people who boast about their faith without doing good works. In today's text, Jesus says that faith without works is dead, just as a body without a soul is dead. Faith with works produces a transformed believer.

In the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus says, "For many who are the first shall be the last, and many who are the last shall be the first. It's not about being the first to come to Madison or the first to come to the States. It may not even be about being the first to come to church. The question you need to ask yourself honestly in your heart is how much are you being changed? And then try to listen to the answer. Part of the beauty of being human is that we can be changed. As long as our faith is alive, we can be transformed. So to have a living faith is to be transformed. This is the kind of faith you can boast about.

Change is an important thing. What needs to be changed must be changed. I hope your vision will be changed. I hope your life goals will be changed. I hope your dreams as parents for your children should be changed also. Amen.