

Men to Men Ministry
Lesson Eleven in the Letter of James
Belief and Deeds Part 3

If there is no change you are dead!

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James 2:18-20 NASB

18 But someone may well say, “You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”

19 You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.

20 But are you willing to acknowledge, you foolish person, that faith without works is useless?

They were half-brothers, same mother, different father. Born in the same little backwater town. They were born into a unique ethnic culture just a year apart. They became inseparable, wherever Yeshua would go there was Yakov. The two of them had the same teachers, went to the same schools, went to the same religious gatherings. They lived in the same home, slept in the same bedroom. More children were added to the clan, there were three more brothers, Joses, Simon, and Judas, and two sisters were added to the family group making nine in a very small house.

Their Pater Familia was a wood worker. If it could be made from wood Joses could carve, build, and create almost anything. He provided for the ever-growing family and had the reputation of stern fairness to all his customers and his children. But as the older boys took on more and more responsibility as they learned the trade, there was a cloud around their family. The head of the household was showing signs of weakness. He was slowing down. More responsibility was placed on the shoulders of the two older boys. Joses had become ill and died at home and it effected the entire family deeply. It was a tragedy. Dad had supported the large family even by Jewish standards, as best he could. Now all the children were asked to step up and do what they could to support the family. Yeshua and Yakov were to take on the trade of Joses. The littler boys would do odd jobs around the town. If there was a destiny for these two boys, it should have been fairly equal. Nature and nurture would say first two boys were of the same cloth and were colored with the same external ingredients.

But there was a difference. The older of the two had become the favorite of their mother. She seemed to smile a little more when the first born was in the room. Fair or not the second born was just one more of the Clan Joses and often lost in the crowd. Yeshua had become the big man on campus. In school brother Yeshua was always picked first for any game or competition. Yesua was special. Yesua was expected to do big things.

Flash forward a number of years. Yesua had given up on the family business, he became an itinerant Rabbi. His hippie-like lifestyle did not include the family. Oh he showed up for special gatherings but they were just not his style. His new vocation did not provide for the family, but it was his calling.

Yakov had to take the place of the eldest to keep the family together. His mother would follow the eldest as much as she could and alongside was Yakov the steady one. At times they were amazed at the teachings of the elder brother. Other times they were a little embarrassed. Yakov kept up his studies and the workshop kept him from following too closely to the Eldest Brother. Always in the shadow. He was faithful to his heritage, his family, his past down trade, Yakov became the male leader in the house. He saw himself as the good son, and in a slightly judgmental way, he saw the older brother as a real disappointment.

Yeshua was a teacher of men. And Yeshua's church grew. Yeshua selected twelve men to help him in the ministry. Most of this new clan was selected from the local area. Fishermen, a tax collector, a zealot, and a few more. But his choices did not include his little brother. Yeshua preached and taught and accumulated thousands of friends and followers. Following his mother, Yakov listened in to a few of the lessons.

For three years it became a love hate relationship between the two brothers. Envy for the notoriety, the acceptance, the seeming devotion of this followers, and yet a haunting disappointment of all the responsibilities of their mother and the smaller children fell on Yakov's shoulders. And for him it was a burden almost to hard to bear.

Yakov would show up to the church of the way once and a while and he was accepted by most, but he never really fit it. It may have been the hidden resentment, or just his orthodoxy to his Jewish heritage. You see brother Jushua was constantly at odds with the religious leaders. He even had called them vipers. He had overturned the societal norms when he went to the temple and made a terrible spectacle of himself by overturning the tables of the buyer and the sellers that provided tax money for the temple.

Yeshua insisted in teaching what was at times contrary to the accepted cultural norms. Yakov's greatest fear for his brother was that he would go too far. And he did. He claimed in no uncertain terms that he was God's Messiah, the great I AM.

The religious leaders could take no more and they had Yesua killed on a cross on hill for all to see. Mary was there on that terrible day, so Yakov was also there. And instead of Yesua remanded Mary to the care of Yakov, Jeshua told John to take care of her. Another slap in the face. Mary was Yakov's responsibility, but the elder brother was within his rights to take care of his mother. And then he was gone.

Yet the church continued, there was a great outpouring of spiritual proportions, there was a communion of a great number of the poor and the rich. The church that Jeshua had started needed a leader. Yeshua had started something that had to be continued. Yeshua had picked Simon as the builder of the church and had given him a new name of Peter, the rock. While not a good leader, he was a good builder. He gave love when love was needed, he preached as one gifted by God Himself. As days turned to months, Peter had become more of a spiritual leader than an administrative one. He had become more of a Pastor than a leader.

Yakov was still among the group, but always was holding back. He had finally severed his pride and his disappointment and accepted his Brother as who he said He was. Yakov was saved by grace. Yet he never wanted to be noticed, because it was always seen, by him, as an inclusion by association. Invitations were given to special meetings and gatherings because of his association with his half-brother. He watched as others began to look to him as the administrator of the church. He was the most levelheaded one to hear all sides of an argument and render the most equitable decision. The day to day leadership of the church fell on the shoulders of the brother of the founder. Yakov assumed the role of being number one in the largest church in Jerusalem. How did he get there? He was the logical choice because of his elder brother.

But his heritage always shaded his decisions. He always seemed to favor the Jewish point of view. Yakov wanted to pull in all the Jewish Christians into a single great church. He even wrote a letter that was published around the known world.

Ultimately, Yakov he became the leader of the Christian Jewish Church. And in that Yakov was a failure. The first of a number of reasons, this mother church of all Christianity, this Jerusalem First Church, suffered the fate of the city. The Romans came in and tore down most of the city in response to a Jewish revolt. Most of the members of the church simply left town. The church to which Yakov became responsible dwindled and became nothing more than a shell. The church itself now changed to one that was primarily a Gentile one but the growth had be stopped. The focus of the church had to change from a local group of culturally associated Jews to one that started to reach out to the whole world. And Yakov could not do that. The very mission of Yeshua was now being interpreted as a mission to the world including the very gentiles that were tearing their world apart. That was the preaching of Saul of Tarsus.

The route taken by the church would have been different had the way Yakov had envisioned prevailed. His approach, restricting the mission of the church to the Jews in the land of Cannan. If you would look carefully at the teaching of the elder brother you would clearly see that Yakov and Yeshua saw the highest priority was to the chosen people of Israel. The special people of God needed to hear of the Promised one.

But then came the writings of Matthew and Luke. The bubble had burst. Both of these writers told of a virgin birth. That the relationship between Yakov and Yeshua was not as great as most thought. The writings of Matthew and Luke tore away the underpinnings of the authority of Yakov. He was not the “REAL” brother of Yeshua. The assumed relationship between the brothers was eroded to a point of destruction. In these new writings, Yakov the brother of Jesus became “Yakov the less” one of many. Most of the time in these new gospels, this telling of the good news, Yakov become almost ignored.

Yakov became James, Yeshua became Jesus

These two brothers are called by different names today in our very English/American language. Yakov the half brother in the family of Joseph became James the less and then James the Just, or simply Just James.

Introduction

James is continuing here to build on what we talked about, in our last study, the connection between faith in Jesus Christ that takes root in our hearts, and how that faith manifests itself in our lives. James's point is this, if you have faith in Jesus, genuine faith, it will change you and it will cause you to become a person whose life reflects that faith.

In our Christian culture, we have ditches on the side of the road of the gospel. We must be very careful to keep in the middle of the one-way road. If we would arrive at our destination it is best to stay out of the ditch on either side.

One of those ditches is what we called last week decaffeinated faith. And that's partly what James is addressing here. We all have been there falling asleep at the wheel out of total exhaustion getting nearer and nearer the edge.

In the middle of the Christian life we have become so tired of keeping on, keeping on, we say to our self, "Does it really matter if I don't do everything I know Jesus would have me do? "Oh, I believe in Jesus. That's good. I believe that Jesus is who he says he is. Jesus died on the cross for my sins. I'm forgiven. Okay, great. That's great. I got a little fire insurance.

Maybe I will just close my eyes for a moment from all the pain that is around me. I know I have reached a wide spot in the road and it seems like a place where I can just slow down and coast. It doesn't mean that I don't believe in my path, doesn't mean I don't have faith, it doesn't mean I am turning around and going the other way, but I am just so heavy-eyed, sleepy and tired.

But as we come to bible study tonight we are almost blinded by some oncoming head lights. James shouts to you, "Oh, so you believe? You believe in God? Great." You are on the right road of belief, but you are starting to weave. Listen to me my brother. Like a slap in the face, he says, "Even the demons believe that,

Exposition

I will show you my faith by my works. James is painting the picture with only two sentences: First. "You have faith and I have works." A man claims he has faith. His Belief: He believes he is saved by faith; God accepts him because he believes in Jesus Christ even if he fails to live for Christ and believe God has accepted him and will take him to heaven when he dies. The Word says: "**Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven**" Matt.7:21.

A man claims to have works. His Belief: God accepts him because he does good works and lives as good a life as he can. He believes that the important thing to God is to be religious and do all the good that a person can. If a person does sin, God will never reject him; God will accept him no matter who he is and no matter what religion he follows. The Word says: "**Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?**" Matt.4:22.

James pulls no punches: To profess faith alone will not save a person and to follow works to become acceptable to God will not save a person. James handles this with one

clear statement: "Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works." Have you ever heard the statement— "the proof is in the pudding?" It may look like pudding, but until I take action to taste it, I won't know. "The truth of something can only be judged by putting it into action or to its intended use." You profess to have faith, now where is the proof; back it up. No man can come to Christ and remain the same. The proof is only in our actions we profess.

2:19 **"You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder."** There are some who say that belief in one God is good and sufficient. It is true that there is one God. He is the only God and there is no other. It is a good thing to believe in the one true God. It is good but, by itself, it is not enough. The demons know that God lives and that he is all-powerful. Their belief is not merely words or thought. It has a real effect on them. They believe and tremble with fear. They are in terror of God. It makes them certain of their own terrible end. They know that one day God will destroy them. He will destroy them because they are not willing to obey him. To say that we believe is of little value if it does not produce good works. Real faith unites people to God. It does not cause them to tremble, but leads them to love God and do good works. Faith is in the heart and the mind. And it shows itself in a changed life, which wants to obey God.

Even The Demons Believe

They believe and they shudder." The very thought of demons on the road strikes us a peculiar. But we open our eyes and there they are. They are living in the ditches on both sides of the road. Calling to us. Inviting us to come and visit for just a moment or two. Demons believe in Jesus. Of course, they do. These demons have seen Jesus. He is the one who graded the road in the first place. But to the Demons Jesus is public enemy number one. They travel the same road looking for someone who is simply not paying attention. To grab the momentary inattention and pull you into the ditch.

They are believers. They know that he's the Lord of heaven and earth. They know that he accomplished salvation. So, all of the theological points, they believe it with certainty. And apparently, that's not enough. They don't bow the knee to this Jesus. They don't look to him to provide these things for them. It's all external. It's information only. One ditch is filled with demons looking to pull you in and devour you.

But there is another ditch on the other side also filled with those who have been captured by the depth of excuse. There's another ditch that James is getting to here, which is the opposite error that says, "Oh, wow, faith and works are really important. I guess I need to focus on my works so that God will bless me." I have to use my brakes at every hint of need. I will stop and give help to all just to please Jesus. My works will be so good that God will allow me to continue on his road. The price I must pay is to go down the road is so much I never make any progress. The road is populated by the poor, the hungry and I never make progress because I am so busy doing that I have no time for Jesus. This ditch is just as dangerous as the one full of demons. And we see that on the other side of things. It's the opposite formula Verse 20 **"But are you willing to acknowledge, you foolish person, that faith without works is useless?"** The other ditch is calling us to say I have to work so much I never make progress. Basically works equals blessing by God. James is kind of

pushing that to the side too and saying, “No, no, the right formula here is that faith in Jesus equals salvation and good works.

When we believe in Jesus, He saves us from our sins. And that results in becoming a new kind of person that reflects that faith in our life. This other ditch becomes the total fatigue we have by doing the right thing. Like driving along, the road full of mud and we simply get stuck. We have raced our motor but there is no progress. They're just given it all they've got. They love the Bible, they love the people in the church, but they simply are tired of the effort it takes. I need something tangible to remind me I am on the right road.

I have been there as a Pastor. Three messages a week, visitation of the poor, ill, hopeless, cleaning the church, being the recipient of woes and terribleness of a hundred or so deeply flawed people. I am just doing everything I can, and I find no rest. No rest stop in the road to life.

Christians aren't immune from some of the struggles. We're not immune from falling into the ditches of legalism, and the ditch of abusing grace and just thinking, “Oh, there's salvation for that. I'll just sin here, and it'll be fine.” So, the difference for Christians is that God, in his grace, draws us back to repentance, and we're trying to walk the narrow path of the gospel.

I know what it's like to be on the treadmill and to think, “I'll just keep going through the motions. I know full well that the Christian life is always only discipline, and when we get to the point of just pulling over something is wrong. The ditch of legalism has called my name.

So, what is the solution to trying to just keeping on with keeping on, for keeping on sake? Sometimes we have to just let Jesus a turn at the wheel. Just letting go for a while and focus on a new driver.

IT IS NOT WHAT WE THINK NEEDS TO HAPPEN, IT IS WHAT HE DESIRES SHOULD HAPPEN.
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It is not What Would Jesus Do (WWJD), or What Did Jesus Do (WDJD), but What Does Jesus Want (WDJW).

He would not want to trust our works for our continuing relationship with HIM. But an internal desire to be a kind of person He would want us to be. That's what the Spirit does, the spirit comes into our lives and changes us into the kind of people that want to know and love and serve Jesus.

If my pursuit of Jesus is always simply, “Ugh, I guess I better do the right thing again,” then what it's exposing is that there's something faulty going on in my heart. There's a lack of rest in Jesus. John 15 comes to mind, “**Abide in the vine, and you'll find rest, and you'll find that God bears fruit through you.**”

So, the key is not to focus on doing all the right things. The key is draw near to Jesus, the fountain of living waters. Draw near to Jesus, the life-giving vine. Unite yourself to him,

and here's what you'll find, he's giving you a life and the energy that you're looking for to keep going after the things that you know are good and right.

And so, it's more it's a matter of which comes first? What I would say is, obedience is always good, no matter how you feel about it. Glorifying God and everything is always good. But if we want to glorify God most naturally, and with enjoyment, then what we first got to do is draw near to and feast upon the Lord Jesus Christ. He will then cause these desires to overflow into our lives.

My advice to avoid legalism, that desire to prove your faith by doing is to have another come to Jesus moment. A place where the Lord is calling out your heart to the fact that you can just rest in him, that He's good, and He's godly and He's holy, and He died for you.

GENUINE FAITH REVEALS ITSELF IN DEEDS OF LOVE

James contends that true Christianity is seen in the person that is willing to be involved in the things of Christ ON CHRIST'S TERMS!

I have a friend who declares that the first three principles of selling real estate are location, location, and location (in that order)! For a genuine faith, the first three principles are involvement, involvement, and involvement

- Involvement with Christ daily
- Involvement with His church daily,
- Involvement with His world, sharing His love.

We are converted to Christlikeness according to v.15, 16.

The Example of Jesus

Jesus spent His life serving, giving and telling. On a desert hillside Jesus fed thousands with a few sardines and pieces of bread. That was not a figment of someone's imagination, it was an act of genuine faith. He wrapped a towel around his waist and washed twenty-four filthy feet. That was no well-crafted parable, it was an act of faith in the principles of servanthood. On a hill outside Jerusalem, He died an agonizing death. It was more than just being an example; He became the gospel, living it out in faith, defining the meaning of love. It was the ultimate expression of receiving the Father's word, and submitting to His will in deed.

Genuine faith reveals itself in deeds of love. What could it possibly mean to ACCEPT Christ, if not to accept His lordship over your life; to accept His choosing of your life's work?

YOU CAN FIND ETERNAL LIFE IN THE KIND OF FAITH
THAT REVEALS ITSELF IN LOVING DEEDS.

Verse 26 which we will get to next week is the key to this principle; **For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.** James uses the negative to illustrate the positive. He tells us a very simple but accurate fact. The body without spirit is dead, so is our faith without works. And the converse is also true. When the body has a spirit it is alive. When our faith is not an perceived illusion, but has loving deeds

sprouting out of that faith, the faith is alive and pulsating. It is like budding limbs on a young tree. The sprouts on the limbs don't cause the tree to be alive; they simply announce the reality that there is life.

I have a cousin who moved to southern Idaho from California. He started a garden and it was rich and lavish. It produced more vegetables than he could ever use. He gave to all this neighbors the excess of the ever increasing crops. There was an early frost in October and he reported to all in the family there was a need to give away even more excess. The frost killed most of the plants and had to be pulled up. He went on to say a few survived in the middle of a sheltered spot next to his shed. Consequently, he pulled all the worthless, dead, and dying and kept the living. The living was still giving a harvest. They were tested by the frost and survived. Simply saying you are a Christian, and associating yourself with a church does not mean there is genuine faith. If there is no production, there is no life.

Jesus told a parable about seed that was scattered. True, some of the seed grew and took hold in good soil. But there was some (much) that only sent down a shallow root, and when the shoot came up it quickly withered and passed from the scene.

I see this same process many times over in churches across the nation today. A person makes a "profession of faith"...but it is only a mirage. They never bother to send down deep roots, joining in the Bible Study program of Sunday School regularly, or worshipping often. They starve that little seed to death, and the faith possibility becomes another statistic of back-door syndrome.

It takes a mature tree to bring worthwhile fruit. You cannot expect a seedling to bear crops; but seedlings that won't grow aren't worth the effort to water, feed and weeding. The point is not vague here. James is telling us that unless we are willing to grow in Christ, allowing the faith to become works, we are the false professors. Our faith is empty, dead, without hope!

You may be a long-time church member or have never joined a church. Frankly, church membership is not at question here. While pastoring in northern Idaho, I met a man at the post office, and we struck up a conversation. He seemed to be a well off person that carried himself well. I asked him the questions of where he went to church. With a smile he said the Church of the Nazarene. I almost fell over. I had been his pastor for over a year and he hadn't worshipped there in that time. I was his pastor and had never met him.

He went on and told me his philosophy was to "do as much good to as many people as he could. He said his relationship with Jesus was good and between them they had a real good understanding about it." Pious-sounding words from a church member? More like a smoke screen for the reality of wanting to be free enough to answer the "call of the Rainbow Trout" on Sundays. There is a balance between "faith and works" that will make a true believer want to be close to his Lord in worship.

Danger in this affect

In this approach to this subject in James is both profound and right. There is nothing more dangerous than the repeated denial of compassion. The more we deny our feelings of concern, care, and compassion, there is a hardening of the heart. Every time there is a pull on your heart strings, when you feel pulled into someone else's need, and then ignore it the

less likely you will feel the pull again. It is a fact that every time a man feels a noble impulse without taking action, he become less likely ever to take actions at all.

**No man has no right to feel sympathy
unless he at least tries to put sympathy into actions.**

How can you know for sure that your faith is alive?

Throw yourself wholeheartedly into deeds of loving service to others. I guarantee you will know inside of a month what is genuine and what is mirage. Where do you start? Begin with forgiving your neighbors, and fellow church members.

Start to give of yourself, instead of concentrating on your own needs. That is the model Jesus gave us.

Near the end of the Civil War, a northern general wrote to Lincoln, "I believe if the battle is pressed now, we will have the surrender of Lee within a month." This worried general had received orders to not back off and voiced his opinion against going full steam ahead. Lincoln simply wrote back, "Then let the thing be pressed!" It was the final turning point of the entire war.

How can you know for certain that your faith is genuine, and not a deceiving mirage? Let the thing be pressed. Get yourself involved in loving service to others. JOIN IN...GET BUSY. A true conversion in faith will take over your life, your family, your pocketbook, and you'll never feel so alive!

Are you alive? Or does the world seem dead-end with only struggle in sight? Do you find no joy other than gratifying your desires, collecting toys and trophies?

Do you ever have questions about the strength of your commitment to Christ? Occasionally a person will get involved in a church, and there's no change. There's no joyful satisfaction to being involved in the things of God. The problem there was the "cart before the horse." You cannot work yourself into having faith. Faith is a gift from God. I invite you today to make a commitment in your heart to the Author of faith, Jesus Christ. Then the works – the good deeds you do will be a matter of joy, not a matter of trying to work your way into heaven. It can't be done!