



Lessons By: Rev. Dr. Johnny R. Freeman

8 Week Bible Study Series

Wednesdays | 6:50pm

United Institutional Baptist Church

802 E. Market Street, Greensboro, N.C. 27401

'A FAITH THAT WORKS!'

Week 6 | Text: James 2:14-24

Introduction

I recently heard a well-known evangelical conservative television preacher talking about racial protest in one of his messages. He started off by saying that what he was about to say maybe considered controversial...but he was going to say it anyway because he's never cared about what other people think. Then I heard that television preacher say that he supported non-violent protests and that he believed that when people protest in a non-violent way that they should be protected by law but if 'they get out of line and turn violent then we're coming out shooting and we're gonna shoot to kill!'

The reason I mentioned that preacher's words is because they illustrate the thinking of a lot of people who call themselves Christian. The thinking of some people who call themselves Christian has long been that as a believer I can say and do what I please without really considering the negative consequences on their personal testimony or the Christian faith as a whole. The question considered in tonight's lesson is does my Christian faith have anything to do with the life that you live and the example that you set in the community and the world. It's no secret that the Christian faith conjures up a lot of negative images by an unbelieving world that looks on at what we say and do, in the name of our faith. The point is people around us are watching us.

They're not just looking to criticize, or discredit our faith I believe people are searching for something. They have trusted in so many things that have let them down. People have trusted in family and friends and been disappointed when people show their flaws and failures. They have looked to their institutions for stability and a clear standard but found political gridlock, scandal and turmoil. I believe that people do have a deep longing and desire for something that will make a difference in their lives.

And yet, too many times, when they have looked for a clear example of genuine faith in too many instances people have been disappointed. What people need more than ever is **A FAITH THAT WORKS!** Have you ever turned on your computer to use it, or tried to access the internet but the device didn't work. I remember wanted to watch the last Sunday night NFL game, between the Green Bay Packers and Detroit Lions on NBC but the channel wasn't working. Whether it is a technology devise, an appliance or bodily function it's frustrating when you want to use it but the thing doesn't work.

The point of tonight's lesson is what good is it to say that you have faith in God if that faith doesn't work for you? What good is it to say that you have faith in God if your faith doesn't work in the real world? A faith that doesn't work is like a key that cannot get you access to a door you're trying to get into or a debit card you go to use that doesn't allow

you to pay for those items you want to purchase? We need **A FAITH THAT WORKS!**

Context

When James writes this epistle that bears his name the Christian faith was going through a major shift. After the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven, the Lord's disciples heard the angels say to them, 'ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven!' (Acts 1:10-11) The bible then says they returned to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives and they were expecting Jesus' return. Have you ever prayed and hoped for God to move on your behalf? You know that, after you pray that first prayer you have faith and hope for an immediate answer from God is high. However, over time, with having to wait on God for your answer that early high level of faith and expectancy can change the more reality sets in. So it was with the early disciples of Jesus. After hearing the angelic announcement of the Parousia, or the second coming of Jesus, to inaugurate His kingdom on earth the early disciples were living in expectation of Jesus' return at any moment. Imagine for a minute living in hope of Christ's return at any moment. The fact that they were living in hope of Jesus' return it meant they thought about nothing else. They didn't work jobs because they were living in hope of Jesus' return at any moment. The early disciples of Jesus, they didn't think about

getting married or raising a family because they expected Jesus to return any moment. They didn't plan for the future nor were they concerned about what they would need to live. After the ascension of Jesus into heaven there was no concern at all for what comes next.

The epistle of James was written as an answer to the question of what's next. James concerned himself with providing practical guidance for believers who were coming to grips with the reality that Jesus had not returned as they had hoped and believed. So now, they needed to know how we live out of faith in the world now. Going forward the early disciples of Jesus needed to develop **A FAITH THAT WORKS!**

POINTS TO CONSIDER:

Now that you say that you are saved, and have a personal relationship with Jesus what's next. Your life after making Jesus your personal Savior has only just begun. Now that you have accepted Jesus Christ and your Lord and Savior what does having Christ in your life mean in terms of what you say and do in the world.

QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS:

After you check the salvation box, and you know that you are saved from eternal judgment, and nothing can take away your salvation, what's next? Now that you know you're

saved are you now free to say and do whatever you want to? Does having faith in God matter in terms of what you say and do in the world? Do you have any responsibility before God in what you do and how you live in the world? How does your faith work in the real world? Does your faith really make a difference in what you say and what you do in the world, or is your faith in God your business and has nothing to do with anything or anybody else?

-CONTEXT-

The Epistle of James deals with a practical application of the Christian faith in daily life. Now that Jesus hadn't returned, as they had hoped and expected the early disciples had to make the pivot, from just waiting for Jesus to return to living out their faith in the world.

QUESTION: SO WHAT WERE THE EARLY DISCIPLES TO DO SINCE JESUS HAD NOT RETURNED?

- 1) They were to live in such a way to show their faith was REAL... As true believers, who have a personal relationship with Jesus God calls us to show some signs that your faith is real. James says 'for whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, do not commit adultery, said also, do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of**

the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.’ (James 2:10-12) Don’t use your religious freedom as license to live any kind of way. God holds us accountable and will judge according to how we live out our faith in the world around us. In other words, **if your faith in God is real what is the evidence?** Anyone who says they have a personal relationship with Jesus must show some signs by working to remain true in the struggle to live out your faith. That doesn’t mean that we’re perfect or that we don’t slip up and mess up but when your faith in God is real you won’t continue to wallow in sin. You learn to confess your sin, repent of it, get back up again and continue trusting in God to help you become more of a reflection of Jesus and less like the world. **According to the epistle of Romans, we are to ‘be transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good, and perfect and acceptable will of God.’ (Romans 12:1-2)** You continue to fight to show that your faith is real! You can’t just ‘cherry pick’ what you choose to live out in the world God is looking at the total life of the Christian.

2) A faith that works must also be Relational... Having a relationship with God isn’t just vertical, or merely between us and God, it’s also horizontal. Our relationships with others are one of the important dimensions of the cross of Christ. Jesus didn’t just come to reconcile God and humanity

Jesus also came to reconcile humanity with one another. The Epistle of John says 'if a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And the commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also.' (1 John 4:20-21) **James says it like this 'what doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith {alone} save him? if a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.'** (James 2:14-17) There has long been a struggle between religious faith and social responsibility. How do we live our faith in ways that make a difference for us and for others around us? Does our faith in God show up in how we treat others?

3) Having a faith that works must also be **Relevant**. In previous generations the church was the hub and spiritual lifeline in the community. The church was the institution out of which our schools were first organized such as Shaw University was organized by Black Baptists in North Carolina, while Virginia Union University was organized by the American Baptist

Home Mission Society in Washington, DC, and Spelman College grew out of Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia. The early Black Church was the mother of the Civil Rights Movement and Black empowerment. Although the Black Church has been far from perfect there was a sense that the church belonged to the community and operated more in step with community needs and issues. The Black Church in the 17th through the early 20th centuries were viewed as being relevant. But the whole idea of a 'post church era' questions the relevancy of the Black Church in relationship with the Black issues today. One of the critiques of the contemporary church is it's irrelevance in the community around the church building. In essence we build beautiful church edifices while being absent in terms of our impact on the community around the church. **A faith that works is a faith that is relevant in making an impact in people's lives. As the church rises and prospers is there any evidence in the community where the church is present. James says 'thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?' (James 2:19-20)** The devil believes in the existence of God but does not do anything about it. The devil knows that God is real but will not submit or obey God's will. So it is with faith that doesn't work. Faith that isn't relevant for real life or the real world is useless. In order for faith to work our faith has to be

relevant in the real world! Having a faith that works means that those around us can see that our faith is real because of our deeds.