



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 7 | Text: James 2:14-24

## Introduction

Have you ever turned on your computer to use it, or tried to access the internet but the device didn't work. I remember wanting to check my email but I kept getting a message unable to access email due to an invalid code! Whether it is a technology device, an appliance or bodily function it's frustrating when you want to use something but it 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 try to use that doesn't allow you to pay for those items you want to purchase? We need **A FAITH THAT WORKS!**

The question to consider in tonight's lesson is does my Christian faith work in the real world? In other words, how do you apply your faith in real life situations? Do you believe one thing but practice another? How do you reconcile what you say you believe with what you do? Your faith says, wait on God for direction but how do you apply your faith in moments when you don't see the results. The point is that in

some instances we don't believe that our faith really works, because we don't always see the immediate results, so a lot of people give up on their faith and act on their own without God's direction.

And yet, too many times, when people don't see the immediate results of having faith in God they allow frustrations and disappointments to influence their trust in God! What people need more than ever is **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 at any moment. Have you ever prayed and hoped for God to move on your behalf? You know that, after you pray that first prayer, your 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' immediate return. 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!**

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.

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 was 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.