

'Faith and Deeds Part 2: Abraham And Rahab'

Last time we opened up James 2:16-18 'Faith And Deeds Part 1'. v14: "What good is it my brothers, (*what will it profit him*) if a man has faith without deeds? Can such a faith save him?" And to answer that question the theologian RC Sproul pointed us toward Matthew 11:1-19. Here John the Baptist has been put in prison and in his despair, even he has fears and doubts while he awaits his fate. So he sends some of his followers to ask Jesus if "He truly is the promised one who was to come. Or should they look for someone else?" But Jesus doesn't answer the question, He simply says, *'let's examine the evidence:* "the blind see, the deaf hear, lepers are cured, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor."

While they are leaving Jesus speaks to the people about John. The spirit of the people of the day said that John was a "demon possessed" wowser, that Jesus was "a drunkard, a glutton and the friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is proved right by her actions." Or in other words, we will know who a person truly is, "by their fruit" he said in another place. Yes the evidence of who someone is at the core of their being is "proved," is vindicated, not only by what they say but chiefly by what they do!

In v15-16, James gives us the essence of hypocrisy. The starving penniless brother in need knocks on our door, and we send him away saying, *God bless you, and keep warm and well fed.* Such a person's faith is not "proved," not vindicated, it's all hypocrisy. So in light of that example, v17: "faith if it is not accompanied by action is dead," *"nekra"* even as a corpse! v20: "arge" useless, empty, barren! In v18, James presents his hypothetical. Someone could say to him: "You have your faith, (*meaning biblical authority and assurance*) but I have my deeds." *My Christianity is in my doing.* Which sounds good. But if they haven't begun from the right place, whatever they do or say, will do them no good. Just as in Pilgrim's Progress, if they haven't begun from 'Yon wicket gate,' meaning Jesus, hell awaits! "No one comes to the father except by me" He said. So like that illustration of the three men in the boat, only when rowing with the oars of both "faith and actions," (biblical understanding and lifestyle) working in harmony, do we get to our destination!

So now we bring chapter 2 to a close today in v19-26 'Faith And Deeds Part 2: Abraham and Rahab!' In v19, as James continues with this hypothetical situation, he now speaks of the ludicrousness of boasting of faith, (or theological understanding) without the evidence of a changed life. V19: "You believe that there is one God. Good!" Manton explains, that James is speaking of someone with the most basic level of understanding about God. For almost 1500 years the Hebrews had been taught that "God is One." Yes that there is only One true God! Deuteronomy 6:4: "Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One." James continues to address those who were claiming their restoration to God by using their verbal affirmation of Jesus as their vindication. And simply because they had made the most basic acknowledgement of who Jesus is. It's much the same as those kinds of things that people say today.

Just as I myself used to say before I was converted. 'Oh yeah, I believe in God.' Well, to just such a statement James is basically saying, 'Good on you. "Even the demons believe and shudder." Do you think that you are onto something special? Do you think that you are standing in a privileged position simply because you acknowledge the existence of God? Well you're kidding yourself. Has not Paul said in Romans 1:21: "For although they knew God they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened." What he is clearly

saying, is that there can be an acknowledgement of God upon our lips, but unless there is evidence of Christ's Blood upon our lives, it adds up to nothing!

Friends, this kind of thing is everywhere today. And yet only a verbal assent of God, is as empty as those who profess it. Here's an example. There are many politicians who professed Christianity and attend many church services, where they will be seen by many people, and particularly so when elections are approaching, but it all adds up to nothing! Just as our Prime Minister did. And then after his victory, went and marched in that yearly celebration of depravity. That betrays everything upon which a true follower of Christ stands. What does such a profession add up to? Well again, nothing. Will such things hold them in good stead come judgement day? No, because "even the demons believe in shudder." Yes they are struck with fear and trembling!

In Mark 5, the man possessed by the legion of demons, sees Jesus coming as we read in v6: "when he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" And Mark 1:32-34 "That evening after sunset, the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed. The whole town gathered at the door and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons but he would not let the demon speak because they knew who he was." They were kept silent by His authority, and they trembled in His presence!

And finally from Mark 1:21-28 we read: "They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law. Just then a man in their synagogue who was possessed by an evil spirit cried out, "What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God". "Be quiet," said Jesus sternly. "Come out of him." The evil spirit shook the man violently and came out of him with a shriek. The people were so amazed that they asked each other, "What is this? A new teaching, and with authority. He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him." Friends the demons acknowledged the power and authority of the Creator and Ruler of the universe, but humanity does not. "You believe that there is one God. Good!" So what says James: even the demons believe that and shudder." Yes the demonic realm "shudders" but mankind does not!

Beloved, I guess the question that we need to ask is do we? What do we think will hold us in good stead come the day of judgement? Do we actually think that even our deep theological understanding or many good deeds and actions can earn our way into God's good graces? No. Nothing but the blood of Jesus! As I continue to say, let us always remember who we are and how we got here. Because self-sufficiency, whether that be in our wonderful Bible knowledge or our community service, will amount to nothing come judgement day!

Now in v20, James begins with what is basically a derogatory statement upon the character of such people: "You foolish man." It's the Greek word "*kene*" which paints the picture of an empty ship rattling around in the wind making lots of noise and groanings, as the waves crash against its sides. But there is no cargo, and no steering, so it's going nowhere. It's where we get the word vanity from. Vanity: empty and useless. Full of hot air. Just an old windbag! There's a character in Pilgrim's Progress called Talkative. That's the way the characters are defined in the book. Christian's the main character, there's also a Mr Worldly-wise man, a Faithful, and a city called Vanity Fair. Talkative is happy to talk about anything and everything, like many people today, who will prattle on endlessly. And he is more than happy to give you his opinion on whatever the matter might be, because the talk itself is the end goal! Well that's the kind of person that James is referring to. But of course, in regard to Christianity!

Blanchard explains that basically there are two kinds of people. There are those who speak to us and question us about our faith in God through Jesus, because they genuinely want to know and understand about the hope that we have about this life and the next. But then there are those, like the people on that anti-Christian show on the ABC, Q and A, who get Christians on as guests not because they genuinely want to know about Jesus. But because they have a demonic agenda. To make themselves look impressive and important, while at the same time make God's people look like fools. But Psalm 2 tells us: "The fool says in his heart, there is no God." Yes that's the kind of person that James is condemning here!

Friends we need to be on guard against becoming that person. When we study or listen to the scriptures preached or taught, we need to be careful that we don't think we know it all, loving to hear the sound of our own voice. We don't want to be that empty ship just banging around making a lot of noise. We need always to have a teachable spirit! And let's remember, that James is challenging the person who claims to be a Christian, but has no vindicating evidence expressed within their lives. Yes that is the one principle that he is seeking to establish. The claim to be Christian without the evidence of an upright life, is a false claim!

And he now gives us two examples of what genuine faith looks like from both Jewish and biblical history. V21: "Was not our father Abraham considered, (*it's that same Greek word edikaothe, meaning proved, justified*) righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar." Now here again we have that dilemma of having to reconcile the teaching of Paul, and that of James. Paul says in Ephesians 2:8-9: "for it is by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not from yourselves it is the gift of God. Not by works so that no one may boast".

Yet James says: "Man is justified by what he does." And although as I said last time, they seem to be saying different things, we will again see they are not! And as James speaks to the predominantly Jewish flock, he uses their ancestor Abraham as his first example v21: "Was not our father Abraham considered righteous by what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?" He recalls what Abraham did in Genesis 22. But for us to understand James' thinking here we need to look more at his journey with God. In Genesis 12, God first called him out of his Pagan father's world and life. In v1-4 we read: "The Lord had said to Abraham "Leave your father's country your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Notice in v1: "The Lord had said." And then we read of the tremendous promises that God makes to him! He doesn't even know where he is going. "Go to the land I will show you." It's not go here or go there. Go to Egypt or Canaan, but "to the land I will show you." And then the first three words of v4: "So Abraham left." What was the "*edikaothe*," the proving or vindicating of his faith? "So Abraham left." If he had of stayed in "Ur of the Chaldeans" would that have been obedient faith? He would have had the head knowledge about the Word of God to him, and what God wanted him to do, and also all of the promises God had made to him. But if he had stayed where he was, then none of that was going to come to pass. And he would have in effect become an example, of what faith is not. As we see in king Saul and many others throughout the scriptures!

Next we find him in Genesis 15. His nephew Lot has been carried off during an attack upon Sodom and the cities of the plains. Abram hears of it and immediately mounts a rescue party. He wins a tremendous victory, and yet Lot is nowhere to be seen. No thanks at all it appears. And I believe this left Abraham downcast and despondent, because really, Lot was the closest thing that he had to a son. But then God again visits him. Genesis 15: "After this the word of the Lord came to him in a

vision: "Do not be afraid Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." Do you not remember the promises I have made to you? And notice Abram's answer, because this was always about children! v2-5: "O Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remained childless?" Then the word of the Lord came to him. "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." He took him aside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars, if indeed you can count them." And then in v6: "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited to him as righteousness." Yes this trust in God's Word by faith, was "credited to Abram as righteousness." God placed this faith into Abram's account, and he deemed Abram to be in credit, so to speak.

Then next we find him in Genesis 22. His name has been changed to Abraham, signifying that he would become "the father of many nations." And he now indeed has a son. The promised son Isaac, through whom all of God's promises would come to pass! It's some 40 odd years since he left Ur. Isaac is in his teens, and now God tells him in Genesis 22:2: "Take your son, your only son, Isaac whom you love, and go to the region of Moriah, sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about." Then astonishingly we read in v3: "Early the next morning"!

I've often wondered if he got any sleep that night. He was only human after all. Yet he was called to kill his own son! V4: "On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance." I wonder if his head has been down the whole time, not wanting to see the place. And those three days, were they symbolic of him having already sacrificed his son to God in his heart, and pointing us to Jesus' three days in the tomb? V5: "He said his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you." But what he's actually saying is *even if I have to put my son to death, (I know not how) but I know that somehow God will give him back to me. Because He has promised, that "through Isaac" will his covenant promises to me be fulfilled!*

It really is astounding faith. The very thought of it as loving parents is beyond comprehension. How his heart must have been breaking with each step he took. I might be wrong, but he must have lain awake at night. He wasn't a robot, he was the loving father that had waited for 100 years, for the birth of this precious boy. And now he must kill him, and then burn him on an altar to God? Well they climb the mountain together. And build the altar together. Then Abraham places his son Isaac upon it. V10: "And he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son." v11-18: "But the Angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, "Abraham. Abraham." "Here I am," he replied. "Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son." Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided. The Angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, "I swear by myself," declares the Lord, "That because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me."

And in James2:22: "You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did." The word which James uses for "complete," is the same root word which Jesus uses when he said, "It is finished." We might put it this way: His theology was proved to be vindicated and real before both God and man, by what he did. No his faith was not merely an abstract idea or emotion. And what's important for us to notice is that in v23 where we read: "And the scripture was fulfilled that says: "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as

righteousness,” meaning placed into the account of, or in credit, as I mentioned earlier. And the word “righteous” *“dikaiosune”* meaning to be right with God. That the scripture which James speaks of is not in Genesis 22, but Genesis 15. Because as we have just seen, it was in Genesis 15 where: “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” And why? Simply because “he believed God!” Yes “he believed” in God’s promises, that’s why he could act as he did.

And so we are not confused, James makes sure that in accordance with Paul’s teaching, we understand that faith came first, Genesis 15. And that his faith is proved or vindicated by his action, in Genesis 22! And then James sums up his thoughts about Abraham in v24: “You see a person is justified, “proved or vindicated,” by what he does and not by faith alone.” Yes a person’s faith is made complete by what they do! “Abraham believed God.” So he left his father’s home and country to “go to a land that God would show him.” He “believed God:” so he travelled three days to mount Moriah saying: “We will worship and then we will return to you.”

“He believed God” as he placed his son upon the altar. “And he believed God” as he drew the knife! Yes Abraham is said to have truly believed because his faith and actions were working hand in hand. His faith was living, and the proof of that living faith was seen in what he did. It wasn’t just theoretical head knowledge, it was real, living faith! v25: “In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging for the spies and sent them off in a different direction?”

You know I’d never really seen the parallels between Abraham and Rahab before. Both of them were in effect called, out of their Pagan idolatrous worlds. No church, or Christian background or heritage to speak of. And perhaps that’s one of the reasons why James uses them as his two examples. Though they are both in the Hebrews 11 hall of fame, before God called them and used them, they were like the rest of us it seems. They were not on some special pilgrimage in search of God, no. And as He does with all of us, He reached down in His Grace and Mercy and took them by the hand! Yes He called them and they responded in faith to that call. And they vindicated their faith by their obedient lives!

Rahab was a prostitute who lived in Jericho. In Joshua 2, we have the account of him sending two spies to Jericho to gather intelligence for the battle ahead. They come to Rahab’s inn, but word reaches the king of their presence. So she hides them and then sends the soldiers on a wild goose chase! In chapter 2, we learned that the whole city “is gripped with fear” because news of Pharaoh and the Red Sea, and the defeat of Og and Sihon, (the two kings east of the Jordan) had spread throughout the land. Destruction was coming, and the whole nation knew it! Well Rahab makes a covenant with the two men. When Israel attacks, (to save her and her family’s lives) she will leave a “scarlet cord in the window” V15-21: “So she let them down by a rope through the window, for the house she lived in was part of the city wall. Now she had said to them, “Go to the hills so the pursuers will not find you. Hide yourselves there three days until they return, and then go on your way.” The men said to her, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this scarlet cord in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house. If anyone goes outside your house into the street, his blood will be on his own head; we will not be responsible. As for anyone who is in the house with you his blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on him. But if you tell what we are doing, we will be released from the oath you made us swear.” “Agreed,” she replied. “Let it be as you say.” So she sent them away and they departed. And she tied the scarlet cord in the window.”

Yes Rahab`s faith also was proved by what she did! This Pagan prostitute living in an idolatrous world became the mother of Boaz, who would marry Ruth the Moabitess. Who would become the mother of Obed, the father of Jesse, the father of David, and all of them included in the line of Christ!

So one simple and yet profound truth we learn after all of these studies. Faith without the vindicating evidence of that faith in our lives is dead. Faith, (or understanding) comes first, but it must be accompanied by a transformed life. If the two do not go hand in hand, we have not that saving faith in Christ!

Let's pray.