

BEYOND EASY BELIEVISM!

(James 2:14-26)

INTRODUCTION:

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote a classic work titled The Cost of Discipleship. In it he wrote these words: "Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church. We are fighting today for costly grace. . . . Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession. . . . Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ living and incarnate. Costly grace is the gospel which must be sought again and again, the gift that must be asked for, the door at which a man must knock. Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and yet it is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ."

James is going to give the antidote to cheap grace. In James' day there was another problem in the church. It was the problem of believing that faith was only a mental commitment to some propositions. James says that is not true faith. In fact he will call it dead faith. Three times in this passage the statement is made, "Faith without works is dead." Look at verses 17, 20, and 26. The antidote of dead faith is a living faith or a dynamic faith.

The more common way of labeling the problem of 'cheap grace' today is to call it 'easy believism.' There are too many preachers preaching easy believism. There are too many churches promoting easy believism. There are too many Christians practicing easy believism.

What is 'easy believism?' "Easy believism" as one person defines it "*is the idea that having a mental belief in Jesus Christ is the same as obtaining salvation.*" You believe that all a person needs to be a Christian is to just say that you believe in Jesus. Another way of defining 'easy believism' is to say that all a person needs to do is to make a "decision" for Christ and then you are safe and secure forever. Is this what you believe?

In James' day he addresses the problems of cheap grace, or easy believism, or dead faith in chapter 2 of his book. He puts the question as "Can faith save us without works." He concludes quickly that "faith without works is dead."

Let's see how James tells us how we can get beyond "easy believism" in our life.

TRUE SAVING FAITH HAS THREE ELEMENTS INVOLVED

First we must see what true saving faith consists of. It has three essential parts to it. Saving faith is more than mere profession. It is more than just saying that you have faith.

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?

The first element of saving faith is knowledge or the intellectual aspect of faith. Faith is not just a blind faith. Faith has eyes. It sees something specific about Jesus. If you are to put your trust in someone you must have some basic information or knowledge about that person. In our political season we are called to trust our candidates for President. But many of us feel that we must know more about them. Who is Barack Obama? Who is Sarah Palin?

Likewise we need to know something about Jesus. What do we need to know about Jesus to have saving faith? Paul summarizes the facts of the Gospel in I Corinthians 15:3, 4 by saying,

"Christ died for our sins, was buried and on the third day He rose again from the dead."

It's very important to know those facts. But merely knowing those facts is not saving faith. Saving faith goes beyond just saying that you believe some facts about Jesus

The second element of saving faith is convinced of the truth of the facts about Jesus. You must not only know the facts about Jesus, you must also have the conviction in your heart and mind that those facts are indeed true. It's one thing to know the facts about someone, you must believe that those facts are true. When the Bible says that Jesus is the eternal Son of God, who was with the father before creation, you must believe that it is true. When the Bible says that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, you must believe that it is true.

You can hear or read a lot about a person whom you are called to believe in, but unless you believe those facts are true you cannot have true faith.

But it's still not enough to know the facts of the Gospel or even have a conviction that it is true.

Your intellectual knowledge and your conviction to the truth of the facts must pass over into the third element of saving faith which is personal trust. In other words your Knowledge and Conviction must elevate itself to Trust. You must entrust yourself to Christ, as an act of your will. You must come to the place

in your life where you abandon all trust in yourself and in your good works as a means of ever being truly right with God and place your trust completely in the person and work of Jesus Christ for you. Faith is "Forsaking All I Trust Him." F-A-I-T-H. Let me illustrate this notion of trust with a well-known illustration:

Let's say that you were to travel to Niagara Falls. And for some reason you found yourself in life threatening situation where you had to cross over those falls and get to the other side. And if you did not make it across the falls you would surely die. As you are standing there, in despair, you suddenly discover a man with a tightrope tied across the falls. To your amazement, he walks across the falls on the wire and then comes back. Then, he takes a wheelbarrow, and goes over and back again. You applaud his efforts.

Next, he comes over and asks if you believe he can take 160 pounds of dirt over and back. Since you've seen him go over and back with an empty wheelbarrow, you're pretty convinced he can do it. And, true to your expectations, he does. Then he walks over to you and asks if you believe he can carry a Man in the wheelbarrow safely over and back. You truly believe he can. You just watched him do it with dirt. And so you say "Yes, I'm sure you can."

But then he looks you straight in the eye and says, "OK, get in." How would you respond? You already have Intellectual faith. You know intellectually what he has done. You also have Conviction. You just watched him take 160 lbs of dirt over and back. You truly believe he can do it. But it's not enough for you to have Knowledge or even Conviction about that man's abilities. You must also have that 3rd element of faith called Confidence or Trust. You must also, as an act of your will, place your Confidence in that person.

It's not until your will is engaged, and you actually get in that wheelbarrow and rely upon him completely to take you across that you have genuine faith in that person. And until you do that, you will never get to the other side. No matter how much you say you believe in him. Mere Cognition or Conviction is just not enough to get you there. Saving faith has these three elements: knowledge, conviction, trust.

But how do we know if we have true saving faith? This is what James' passage is getting at. He wants to show what saving faith looks like in a person's life.

TRUE SAVING FAITH HAS A CERTAIN LOOK ABOUT IT

Basically saving faith for James is a living faith. Anything else is dead faith. In verses 14-17 he states that dead faith is of no profit and illustrates it as the same as telling a person who is naked and hungry all you say is God bless you. What profit is it to them? Living faith must have some actions attached to it. James calls faith without action profitless and only demon faith, This is his example in verse 18-20.

But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe; and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?

If all you have is intellectual faith it is no better than the faith that demons have. They know more about Jesus than you or I will ever know. But do they trust Jesus? No. They are convinced even that what they know about Jesus is true. They tremble because of it. But do they trust Jesus? No. They have only demon faith and so do you if you are not trusting Jesus in a way that shows up in your life.

Recent polls by George Gallop found that at least 90% of Americans believed in God. But do you think that 90% of Americans have genuine saving faith? What James is saying is that if Gallop Pollsters visited Hell and surveyed the Demons, they would find that 100% of the demons believe in one true God. The Demons have faith! They know who Christ is. And they know He can save those who put their trust in Him. But they don't have Saving Faith.

James is saying that the way to tell if your faith is true saving faith is to look at what controls your life's decisions and actions.

James mentions again that faith without works is dead. What kind of works is James thinking of? It is not just being kind, doing good things for others. There is nothing wrong with these. But even the non-Christian does these things. And we know that doing these kinds of good works will never save us. Paul makes that clear when he writes:

(Eph 2:8-9 NKJV) For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, {9} not of works, lest anyone should boast.

The works that James is thinking of are works that are the action which come from faith in God's promises and purposes. Look at the two examples he mentions. He gives us two examples from the Old Testament. One is when Abraham offered his son Isaac on the altar and the other is when Rahab the harlot received the spys and sent them away from danger..

Abraham may not have understood why God was asking him to do this, but he was convinced that God's purpose was to be fulfilled through Isaac and that God would raise Isaac up if need be. (Heb 13). And Rahab may not have understood much of God's plans and purposes but she knew that God's will was for Israel to be victorious and she acted on it.

What do these two illustrations have in common? They both show that it was doing the will of God was what controlled their actions. Abraham put doing God's will above his commitment even to the love of his life. Rahab put doing God's will above her personal safety. Doing the will of God is the test of having true saving faith.

When we are trusting Jesus Christ we will love Him above all. Our love for Him will be shown in the actions of our life. Do the actions in our life demonstrate that we put Him first and his will. If they do not, then our faith is no different from what the demons have and it is DEAD according to James.

CONCLUSION:

Anything less than a faith that shows itself in outward actions of putting the will of God first in our life is "dead faith." Now dead faith is ugly and unnatural.

Some years back the Chinese dictator Mao Zedong died. When he did some of the Chinese leadership was afraid of what would happen to this nation without their legendary leader. They called in his personal doctor, Dr Li Zhisui to do an impossible task. They wanted the chairman's body permanently preserved. The doctor didn't want to do it. He had seen the dried up shrunken remains of Lenin & Stalin in USSR. He was a doctor. He knew that a body with no life in it is doomed to rot.

But he had his commands. Twenty-two liters of formaldehyde were pumped into the dead chairman's body. The result was horrifying. Mao's face swelled up like a ball, and his neck was as thick as his head. The pressure of the fluid in his body caused his ears to stick out at right angles and the chemical oozed from his pores. A team of embalmers worked 5 hours with towels and cotton balls to force the liquids down into the body. Finally the face looked normal, but the chest was so swollen that the jacket had to be slit in the back and his swollen body was covered with the red Communist Party flag. It's pretty sickening, isn't it?

There is absolutely nothing natural about a dead body. You can put make-up on them. You can fix their hair and dress them up in the best clothes money can buy, but there is something unnatural about a body with no life. A faith that

doesn't show itself in its actions of love for God and His will is unnatural and just as ugly as a corpse and just as dead!

Ask God to show you if you have true, living, saving, dynamic faith, working faith. Do not deceive yourself.! Don't fall prey to a damning false assurance simply because you have made a profession of faith. Don't fall prey to a damning false assurance because you say that you have faith. Don't fall prey to a damning false assurance because you do even good things. Hear God's voice today and respond with genuine repentance and faith. Ask for a faith that shows itself in putting God's will first in your life even when you have to choose between something you love greatly or even in the safety of your life.

Amen? Amen!!