

## Discovering How True Faith Works in Real Life

1/17/99

### “Authentic Faith” #1

...wondering, did something come today? You know this week it has been in the news that up in Detroit, because of rain, sleet, snow, and hail, some people did not get their mail. They have been very unhappy people because they did not like the fact that the mailman was not able to make his delivery which would always seem so certain and so sure. Of course, in the last few days we have seen that we have had another postal increase and now it is costing us a penny more to send our letters. It seems that wherever we go and whatever we do in life something in life connects and revolves around getting mail. Today there is a new way to get mail. The new way to get mail is that many of you, either later today or possibly sometime tomorrow, will go to a computer terminal and with a few brief keystrokes an icon, just like the one you see here, will appear. If you have never done this before you will find that when that happens, a little box like that comes up and a voice speaks to you and says, you have mail. All you have to do is click right on that mailbox and when you do it opens up. When it opens there are a series of e-mail letters that have come to you. It looks just like this.

Did you know that the book that I preach from every Sunday is, in many ways, a compilation of letters? In particular, the New Testament was a series of people who were disciples of Jesus Christ, followers of Christ, to whom God gave messages to send to believers and to churches. You find names like Paul, Peter, and John. Names like Philemon and James. It was James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ, who wrote a specific letter focused on the subject of authentic faith. He sent it to a group of believers in Jerusalem and then those who were scattered beyond. It was the chief desire of James that this letter would be circulated and that the message of the letter would be something that would take root and take heart in the lives of people who were believers and followers of Jesus Christ. Just as we today could go to an e-mail box and pull up an e-mail so it could have been that had they had the technology in that day that we have in this, that we may have had an e-mail that would have been circulated. The interesting thing about e-mail is that if the text is long it simply opens and there is just a window and something comes up in the window. I think if we were to bring up the window of the Book of James, we would find that rather than starting necessarily in James, Chapter 1 and verse 1, possibly the text, the heart-beat, the core of the issue that James wanted to communicate was found in James, Chapter 2, verse 14.

I want to invite you this morning if you have a Bible, to open to the letter of James and there to join me in the middle of that text. In reality James was probably written in scroll fashion. It was written in a fashion in which it would be unrolled and read. There were actually five chapters as we have it in our Bible today so this would be rather a lengthy scroll to read. The key text, the focal point, of the Book of James is Chapter 2, verse 14. I want us to read it together. I have provided it here on the screen in a modern translation, the J.B. Phillips Translation. While I want you to turn to it in your Bible I want to take just a moment and read it from here. Mr. Phillips, in translating this verse says, now what use is it my brothers for a man to say he has faith if his actions do not

correspond with it. Could that sort of faith save a man's soul? It is an interesting question isn't it? If someone says, I have faith, but there is no corresponding action, there is no reflection, there is no difference in the direction, the attitude, and the disposition of their life than anyone else, is that the real kind of faith the Bible talks about and calls saving faith. Well, I think we are going to find beginning today, in the Book of James and each week that will follow, that James has a lot to say about what real faith looks like. In fact, I really believe that the entire Book of James is simply about authentic faith. What James tells us is that there is nothing like the real thing. There is nothing like the real thing because the real thing reflects in the life of a spiritually minded, Bible believing person, a connection to their life that allows them to live and to act differently. Because Christianity is not simply given the message of the Bible, the messages from this pulpit are not simply given to intrigue our minds; they are given to change our lives. So today we are going to begin a new series of messages out of the Book of James. Together we are going to seek to learn and to discover together what it means to have an authentic faith and what it means to live that faith out in our lives. In fact, what James deals with really is a very contemporary debate. He deals with issues of faith but he also deals with values.

For spiritually minded people faith is the driving force of their life. In fact, many of us use faith as a description of how we live and why we live the way that we do. Let me just take a minute and define the term faith for you if I could. The term faith, in and of itself, simply defined means trust or dependence. It is exactly what you are doing by sitting in that chair this morning. You are trusting that chair to hold you up. You have trust. You have dependence on that seat. In a very simplified fashion sitting in a chair is a wonderful illustration of faith. Consequently, when people are struggling sometimes we say to them, have faith. The encouragement is to trust, to depend, and to rely. But the word faith cannot only be used in the sense of have faith, trust, depend, or rely, it can also be used to speak of persuasion. It can be used to speak of a body of belief. I not only speak of having faith but I oftentimes speak to people about my faith and I say to them, my faith has made a difference in my life. My faith has given me confidence in uncertain moments of life. In that sense faith can be defined as a system of belief that governs the behavior of my life. So, in many ways, James uses this term interchangeably. He uses it to speak of that defining moment in life of trust and dependence when you put your trust in Jesus Christ. He also uses it to say, if that faith is real, then it becomes a part of a behavioral system of life that changes the way that you live. Now that is a biblical definition of faith. That is a spiritual perspective of faith.

Now, let's move from the spiritual world to the social and moral world in which we live every day. Every day in our lives we are faced with a conflicting series of decisions and choices and experiences that, in determining how we respond to them, is really a reflection of what we are on the inside. It is a reflection, spiritually, of our faith but socially and morally it is a reflection of our values.

The values debate is raging in America still today. People are talking about values. What are values? Well, let's define it just for a moment. Values are the standards that shape and control our actions and attitudes to situations and people. They are the

standards that shape and control our actions and attitudes to situations and people. What we find in the Book of James is that real faith is seen in visible values, values that are lived out in life. When faith and values come together in the life experiences of my life that is what the Bible would call authenticity. That is what the Bible would call genuineness. Authenticity is the connecting point between faith and values in my life situation. What James is saying is that I want you to have a faith that is so real, values that are so connected in your conscience that it is lived out every day in your life.

Why do I take all of this time to set the background? Because, ladies and gentlemen, I am afraid that today in churches all across America there is a dead orthodoxy that prevails. What I mean by that is that you can go into churches just like this church this morning all across America and around the world and you will find people who use proper words, people who speak of spiritual truth, and people who speak of the Bible but the issue is that while there is orthodoxy in the pulpit and maybe even orthodoxy in the minds of those who occupy the pew, the reality is that faith is never connecting with their life. Consequently, instead of having churches that are living and breathing and reproducing and vitalized, we have churches that are dead and dying in orthodoxy. Orthodoxy without orthopraxy is just a zero with the edges cut off of it. It is nothing. I fear that today we have a lot of mannequin ministry.

Have you ever been in a department store, walking along looking at something, and then you needed to speak to a salesperson? Have you ever mistaken a mannequin for a salesperson? Have you ever thought a mannequin was real? It is really an embarrassing moment when you almost walk up and you go, oh, that's not real, it is not alive! I wonder how many times come in their churches when they see what they thought was something living but was found to be only a mannequin, only to find something that had the right clothes, had the right fit, and had the right colors but there was no life. You see, authentic faith is where it touches real life and James is saying to everyone of us that just as the body without the spirit is dead so faith without works, faith that doesn't show itself in values, that lives out an invisible expression of commitment to Christ, this is emptiness, this is death. So we must be serious about our faith and we must be serious about our values. It is not exposure to the truth of God it is the exercise of faith in the truth of God exercised in my life in obedience that makes me an authentic believer and a reflection of Jesus Christ.

I have a great concern ladies and gentlemen, as your pastor, that we not simply be a mannequin. I have a great desire that we would understand that who we are as a church is a body of people who individually have come to a place of personal faith and trust and dependence upon Jesus Christ. A body that now says we want the behavior of our life to be governed by the system of belief in Jesus Christ. When that is real in each of us individually then corporately there should be some expression of that faith. There should be some family values that we share as members of this body. Those family values should be evident; they should be expressions of the reality of faith inside of us. So what we are really going to do in the Book of James is we are going to take time to look at faith and to look at values. We are going to see faith applied to our fellowship. We as God's people are going to seek to know what it is and then to express together a culture

that is reflective of the value of a true and an authentic faith because we love God and we want to honor him as his people. So let's get started this morning.

Let's take the few remaining moments we have and simply look together a little further at this highlighted portion here in James, Chapter 2. This is what I would call the key verse, the key text, in the Book of James. Let's read a little bit further. James 2:14 – What does it profit my brethren if someone says he has faith but does not have works. Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food and one of you says to them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled but you do not give them the things, which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also, faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 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 there is one God you do well. Even the demons believe and tremble but do you want to know, oh foolish man, that faith without works is dead. It is dead. A dead religion and yet we serve a living Savior.

What are the reflections of an inauthentic faith? What must we do if our faith is to be authentic based upon what James is saying to us here in Chapter 2 and verse 14? I think there are several things and I want to just point them out to you.

First, and foremost, you will notice in James 2:14 that he says, what does it profit my brethren if someone says, is someone says. He is talking about the way people talk. What he says here is that authentic faith moves beyond a superficial reverence. It goes beyond simply saying the right words. It goes deeper than that. The problem with just saying the right words, the problem with so much of the reverence that people try to express is that it is superficial. It is surface only faith. Jesus was very concerned about this. In fact, throughout his ministry Jesus made it a point to point out superficial surface people. In the Book of Matthew, Chapter 7, if you will turn over there just a moment from the Book of James. Matthew, Chapter 7, Jesus spoke of a group of people who went around teaching and preaching and he talked about what they were really like. They were false teachers. Oh what they said sounded right, what they said sounded true but Jesus said do you want to know whether or not a teacher is true? He said, here is the test. Matthew, Chapter 7, verse 16 – You will know them by their fruits. But men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles. Even so, every good tree bears good fruit but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Therefore, by their fruits you will know them. Jesus said, let me give you the most obvious way to test whether something is true, to test whether or not it is genuine. If the fruit that it bears is not consistent with the nature it declares, then there is something wrong. If a tree is told to be an orange tree but it bears apples, there is something wrong with that tree because the nature of an orange tree is to bear oranges. What Jesus was saying is, don't just look at the words, don't just listen to what people declare, look at what kind of fruit they bear in their lives. It has to go beyond some sort of a superficial reverence.

Jesus, on another occasion, said that there will come a day when a group will stand before him and will say, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, did we not cast out demons in your name? Jesus said, I will say to them depart from me for I never knew you. You see it is not just in having the right words. I am sorry to say that I am afraid that many people have come into churches and gotten used to going to church and they have learned church lingo but while they know the lingo they don't know the Lord. What I am saying to you is there is nothing more crucial in this church then we start at this foundation that we move beyond a superficial reverence to a faith that is real, that is personal, that is deep, and that is compelling.

When I was a teenager I had the opportunity on several occasions to hear a very colorful and a very unique preacher who lived in central Florida. I lived in Memphis, Tennessee at the time. He came to speak at my church there on several occasions. His name is Peter Lord. Peter Lord had a statement that in many ways kind of summed up his ministry. It is a great statement and I want to share it with you today. Peter said, "we practice what we really believe and all the rest is just religious talk." That is pretty strong isn't it? But that is exactly what James is saying here. He is saying, if all you do is say, say, say but there is no reflection, there is no change, there is no deed, there is no work, there is no fruit, then, he said, all that is is a superficial reverence in your life because real faith brings real change to life. Now many people have seen this passage of scripture as being a passage that puts Paul who says we are saved by grace along through faith alone, in conflict with James who says faith without works is dead. But I want you to know that nothing could be further from the truth. For you see, in reality we don't have Paul and James standing face-to-face confronting one another. We have two men who are standing back-to-back; they are fighting for the faith. Paul, on the one hand, is saying it can only be by faith and James is saying, yes that faith, when it is real is seen in a different light. Paul said it himself in Ephesians 2:8-10. If you will get your prepositions right in Ephesians 2:8-10, you will never have a problem reconciling faith and works. There is only one way that anyone can ever be saved, it is by grace. It is all the work of God. It is the initiative of God. It is the completed work of God. It is the compelling of God. It is by grace, but then it is through faith. There is an individual moment when I must release and relinquish my will to the Lord Jesus Christ, when I must be willing to put my trust in Him even as you transferred your trust to that chair today, you transfer your trust to Jesus Christ. It is by grace. It is through faith but it is unto good works. Because when you have put your faith in Christ then the good works come out in your life. Your life goes beyond simply being a superficial confession to be a life that is real, that is a qualitative reflection of a life committed to Jesus Christ. It is not just a profession of faith that saves us; it is a possession of faith. When it is real it changes your life.

Probably one of the clearest pictures of that is a man by the name of Zacchaeus whose life story is told in the Book of Luke, Chapter 19. Zacchaeus was a little man who had been a tax collector, a twister, and a swindler. He had taken money from all kinds of people but when he met Jesus Christ and when he believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, his faith then had works and he said, half of my possessions I give to the poor and if I have defrauded anyone of anything I will give him back four times as much. Let me tell you,

that was a changed man! He had a profession that did something with his possessions. You see, authentic faith goes beyond superficial reverence. But the Bible tells us something else here in the Book of James. Not only does it tell us that authentic faith goes beyond superficial reverence it says that authentic faith can't substitute professional performance. Look in verse 15. If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food and one of you says to them, depart in peace, be warmed, and filled but you do not give them the things, which are needed, what profit is there. James says there is a group of people who know the script. When somebody comes to them they know exactly what to say. It is a scripted response. It is a nice professional performance but that is all it is. When all that we have is a professional performance rather than a willing service to meet the needs of others, there is something wrong with our faith.

There is a word in the Bible. It is a word that is often used and associated with the church. It is the word hypocrite. The word hypocrite in the Bible is actually rooted in the ancient Greek culture and the Greek word hypocrite itself simply means someone who is wearing a mask, someone who is play-acting. Someone who is living out a role but is not really true to their nature. What the Bible is telling us is that if we are content to simply have a professional performance that says, yes, God bless you, I will pray for you and that is all we do, then something is wrong with that kind of faith. Real faith cannot substitute professional performance for genuine willing service. How many times did Jesus confront the Pharisees? When he would heal a blind man? When he would forgive a fallen woman? He would confront them because they scripted and they said everything as though they were reading from the script. They sounded so true. They sounded so righteous. But they were hard and they were heartless and they were cold and they were mean. Jesus made it clear there was nothing to be found in that kind of religious performance. Don't you just love the Pharisees? I mean they are the whipping posts of the Bible aren't they. I mean don't you find yourself reading the Bible and you start reading about those Pharisees and you just feel like you just kind of want to just say, they get everything they deserve and more. We all love that. We all love to read about the Pharisees. We all love to talk about hypocrites. You know what is really hard? It is when we start seeing the Pharisee in us.

During the Christmas holidays I did what a lot of families do. I took my family to see some of the movies that come out at Christmas. It is always a fun thing to do. We go get a big thing of popcorn and some Cokes and go in in an afternoon and sit down and watch a movie together as a family. It is always hard to find a good movie and you never really know what you are going to see. I had seen a few little commercials on television about a movie called Jack Frost, something about a snowman. I thought it was a comedy. I thought it would be great to go and see. So we went to see the movie. It wasn't a comedy. In fact, the interesting thing about the movie is that it was the story of a young man who was a young father and he was a musician. He had a dream of becoming a professional, cutting a big record, and making a big hit. Yet he had this wonderful family, a wife that he loved, a boy who was about 12 or 13 years old. He was always intentioned between spending time with his wife and his son and trying to fulfill this dream. He would get a whole string of gigs put together and he would go out and be on the road for two weeks. Then he would come home and he would have wonderful

moments with the wife and with his son. He was always making promises of what he would do someday but he was always tense between trying to be home and staying on the road. Finally, on Christmas Eve, he promises them he is going to make up for all the lost time and that he is going to take them off to a cabin up in the mountains, they are going to go out and cut a Christmas tree, and they are going to have an old fashioned Christmas together. Just an hour before they pack the car to leave a call comes from a record company with his first opportunity to make a big label and to be able to be identified. In the tension of that moment he decides he needs to go and meet these executives and he sends his wife and his son on up to the mountain and says he will come a day or two later. Well he gets in the car and is going along. The further he gets from home the more miserable he is because he really realizes that what matters in his life is his family. So there is a wonderful moment when he stops and tells the band to go home and he turns the car around and he starts to drive and he is going to surprise them in the cabin. But he has an accident and is killed on the road on the way back. That was the hard part of the movie. After that, his boy remembers a snowman that they had made one season and he makes a snowman a year later in the front yard and dad comes back as a snowman. Seriously. The rest of the movie is how dad came back as a snowman and he and his son have this relationship. He is a snowman in the front yard and nobody believes the snowman is real and the snowman is alive. The kid goes everywhere with the snowman. It was stupid! I mean it was so stupid! But here is my point. Do you know what I did? I cried. I cried in this movie. I cried because this dad was killed in a car accident. I cried because his wife and little boy had to make life work without him. I guess especially because I am a pastor and because I have been to the graveside so many times I really do know what kind of hurt and life change comes in peoples' lives when an accident or an injury or a sudden death comes. I guess it just, you know, the holidays, I don't know. Maybe I was tired. I just cried! When I left that movie I thought, that was so stupid. I cried about a man who became a snowman!

You want me to tell you what really bothered me? It was that I cried at a movie about a man who became a snowman and I go for months at a time and I don't cry over people who are lost and who are dying and who are going to hell. I cried about some little surface performance and sometimes I don't cry over the things that are eternal, the things that really matter. Ladies and gentlemen, I simply want you to know that as much as I love to whip up on the Pharisees there are many days in my own life where what I see is be warmed, to be filled, and to be comforted. God bless you and I will pray for you. But you see James says there is something wrong with that kind of faith. There is a credibility gap. Hear me carefully. I am not talking about perfection here. I am not perfect and you are not perfect and there are going to be days when I am very faithful to God and there are going to be days when I stumble. But I want you to know that what I am talking about is a direction of life, a direction of life where faith is so real that it doesn't allow me to simply go around with the script, whipping the script out of my pocket, saying be warmed, be filled, be comforted. Yet I want you to know that is what is happening in our churches. It is that people see that our religion is surface only. People see that our religion and our piety are many times a scripted response and there is emptiness and there is injury when faith is purely performance. You see authentic faith will not substitute professional performance.

There is something else that James tells us in this book. That is if we say but we don't do, there is a problem, there is a superficial type of an evidence of faith there. He says if we just read the script and say, be warmed and be filled that is a professional performance. He says down in verse 19, you believe there is one God you do well, even the demons believe and tremble. That is a strong statement. That was especially strong to Jewish believers.

The core confession of the Jew is this, Deuteronomy, Chapter 6, and verse 4. Shaman Israel. Hear oh Israel, the Lord your God is one. That is the great confession of the Jew. It was the monotheism of the Old Testament. It was the faithful statement that there is one God, one Lord, and the greatest expression of faith was the affirmation of one God. He said, you believe there is one God, you do well, but he said let me tell you something, Satan is every bit as orthodox as you are. He said real faith goes beyond intellectual acceptance. Real faith isn't just knowing something in your mind. It is not just being able to say, yes I know that. Instead it is something that gets into your heart and changes the direction of your life. That was the issue he was talking about here. He was talking about a faith that is so real that the works are seen in life because it is moved from the mind to the heart to the will to the feet.

It may surprise you to know just how orthodox the devil really is. He is very orthodox. But the devil is not going to heaven. The devil is not saved. The devil doesn't know what it is to trust in Jesus Christ. Yet suddenly and sadly many people believe that if they have simply not denied God and if they have not cursed Jesus Christ, that they are going to heaven. That is probably the greatest heresy of our world today. It is that people believe if they have not denied God and they have not cursed Christ, then they are as good as the next fellow and they are going to heaven. But I want you to hear me this morning. Intellectual acceptance, even of the facts of the gospel, is not sufficient to forgive your sin and to take you to heaven. It is not knowing the plan of salvation. It is knowing Christ. It is trusting Christ. It is putting your faith and your dependence in Christ and in Christ alone for salvation. What James is saying is that authentic faith begins with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

I want to ask you this question this morning. Do you have real faith or is there some sort of superficial expression of your faith? Is there just a professional performance, especially good at it on Sundays? Is there just an intellectual acceptance or has there ever been that true defining transforming moment in your life when you have transferred your trust and your belief from yourself and the world and everything around you, even from religion, and you have put your faith and your trust in Jesus Christ? Friend, if that has never happened, that needs to happen today. Today could be the most wonderful day and the most wonderful moment for you because today could be that moment of salvation when faith becomes real in your life. For others of us we have made that commitment but this morning's message is, as though it were, a measuring rod to be laid down next to our life and say, have we begun that process of becoming a mannequin, of having appearance but not really having life, not living for Jesus Christ. You haven't followed him in the waters of believers' baptism. You haven't associated with a local body, a local

church and there needs to be that commitment in your life. Friend, if that has never happened, this moment could be that moment for you.

Father, I thank you today for your Word, its power and its penetration in our lives today. Father, we confess to you this morning that what we want is to be real. We want to be true. We want to be authentic. We don't want to be hypocrites and we don't want to be phonies. Lord, we know we can't do that in and of our own power. We know that what makes us real is the power of the gospel. It is what Christ does in us. Father, I pray that this moment would be a moment of faith and of commitment and of surrender. Lord, I pray that these messages would be messages that you would use to shape us, such that we would become real reflections of the living Christ. Lord, I don't know what you want to do and I don't know who you have brought here and for what purpose today but I pray you would move and speak in peoples' hearts and lives in this time of decision. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want you to look up this way. In just a moment we are going to stand together and we are going to sing a hymn of invitation. We are not going to sing long but we are going to sing. We are going to invite people from all over this building from wherever you may be seated. Today, if you have a spiritual desire to trust Christ, if you have a desire to take a next step in your walk with Christ, to know how to become a part of his church, to follow him in baptism, we are going to ask you to come and speak with one of our pastors who will be here at the front waiting to receive you. We want to take time to share with you and to help you. Let me ask that no one be moving or leaving away from the front unless it is an absolute emergency. This is the most important moment in this service this morning for someone here, possibly. Your leaving could disturb an eternal decision today. I don't say that to make you feel guilty. I say that because I want you to be mature in your faith. I want you to reflect spiritual values in our church. It is important that we share together and we wait together and we pray together to see the work of God today. So I want to invite you to stand to your feet. Pastors I want to invite you to come and join me and stand with me here. Today if there is a spiritual commitment you need to make I know it is hard and I know there are a lot of people but just slip out and come. We will be waiting to receive you and to help you. Come and follow Jesus Christ.

Sermon presented by David McKinley  
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