

James 2:14-19

May 3, 2020

The internet is full of myths. Did you know you can't trust everything on the internet? Who knew?

Shocking news, I know.

There is a widely reported myth centering around Jeremy Bentham. If you have never heard that he was a British philosopher that died nearly 190 years ago. The myth reported that Bentham requested that his dead body attend every meeting of the University College of London and the minutes to the meeting always record Mr. Bentham as, "Present, but not voting."

Nick Booth—the curator of UCL—reports that this is not at all true.

'It's a brilliant story. It has everything: a dead body, academic eccentricity, reanimation of a corpse, ancient tradition. What's not to love? Except, unfortunately, it's a myth, one of the many legends that have built up around the "old radical" that he would have enjoyed.'

Not true.

But sometimes the truth is stranger than fiction.

Bentham directed his friend a Dr. Southwood Smith to create an Auto-Icon. What does that mean? Bentham describes it—

“The skeleton he will cause to be put together in such a manner as that the whole figure may be seated in a chair usually occupied by me when living, in the attitude in which I am sitting when engaged in thought in the course of time employed in writing....He will cause the skeleton to be clad in one of the suits of black occasionally worn by me.”

So...For those of you scoring from home, Bentham directed that his skeleton, hair, clothes, and stuffed with hay and bolted it to a chair and put it in a box.

That is TRUE not a myth. That is NORMAL, right?

They were going to try and preserve his head—but that process went bad. Don't google it, you won't get it out of your mind.

Look at the picture—

An Auto-Icon of Jeremy Bentham.

None of us are going to look at that and think this part skeleton, part hay, part wax thing is a real person. Clearly. We can tell the difference between something dead and alive.

James says NOT so fast.

You might be confusing REAL faith with DEAD faith.

Genuine faith in Christ has certain life characteristics. Certain entailments. James is going to guide in that exploration today.

PROP: Authentic faith is made clear by the life you live.

So today, we are going to let James—our brutally honest ever to the point friend—help us determine real faith from dead faith.

What is faith?

2 Signs of Dead Faith

¹⁴What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” James 2:14-19

PRAY

PROP: Authentic faith is made clear by the life you live.

Defining Faith

False Faith

1. *Defining Faith*

Vs. 14,

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”

Do you see what he is asking? He is saying is the kind of faith that has no works authentic faith? That might sound confusing especially if you have been a Christian or been around Church for a while.

You have heard that our salvation is:

By Faith alone

In Christ alone

Through Grace alone

Salvation is by faith alone.

So what is James saying then he says?

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”

Is he saying that salvation is NOT by faith alone?

No.

Salvation IS by faith alone.

Yes, salvation is by faith alone but the question James is asking is—is your faith making a difference in your life?

James is not questioning whether salvation is by faith alone, he is asking us to examine our faith to see if it is genuine. James is asking us to consider if our faith is real. Or to put it another way, he is not telling us HOW to be saved, he is asking IF we are saved.

How can we tell? Let's go back to verse 14,

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?”

In other words James is saying something like this—is the kind of faith in Christ that doesn't lead to any life change real faith? Can that faith save him?

Spoiler. No.

Why?

Because that is not real faith.

It makes perfect sense. You come in contact with Jesus and you cannot stay the same. Authentic faith in Jesus Christ will lead to a life of good works. Let's get that order straight—God works alone do not lead to life in Christ.

Do you see?

Salvation is not by good works, but by faith in Christ.

BUT!

Those with salvation in Christ live a life marked by good works.

This is so important for us to understand. So many people populate churches and they do not understand this distinction. Jesus never directs us to clean up our act and change ourselves to improve ourselves TO be saved.

Rather he says, to all sinners, “come.”

To the vile—he says come.

To the profane—he says come.

To the promiscuous—he says come.

To the greedy—he says come.

To the selfish—he says come.

To the self-righteous—he says come.

What does he ask? Just to come and ask forgiveness and believe (have faith) that he is the only person who can save you from your sins.

TO be saved we go do Jesus. That is it.

James picks up the conversation there and is saying something like this—

Do the vile who stay vile have real faith? No.

Do the profane who stay profane have real faith? No.

Do the promiscuous who stay promiscuous have real faith?
No.

Do the greedy who stay greedy have real faith? No.

Do the selfish who stay selfish have real faith? No.

Do the self-righteous who stay self-righteous have real faith?
No.

James is describing what authentic faith in Christ looks like.

Genuine faith in Jesus Christ always leads to a life of good works.

Real faith never looks like Jeremy Bentham. Authentic faith leads to a life of good works.

Philip Melanchthon put it exactly right when he said,

“We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that *remains* alone.”

James is asking us—is your faith in Christ real? Or is it just words?

2. False Faith

Workless Faith

A Faith devoid of obedience is not real faith.

What kind of obedience? Toward those in your church that have need.

We see this in verse 15—17.

¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Another Bentham kind of faith is a faith that doesn't lead to self-sacrifice or service for others in your church community. We know that James is first thinking of a Christian's church community by using the words 'brother or sister.'

WORKLESS Faith looks like this—

When we see a brother in sister in serious need: lacking the basics—food, clothing, shelter—you see them and say, “Go in

peace.” If you say that are you doing that person with scalding need any good?

No.

Empty words are no help for those with empty stomachs.

And if you say, “be warm and well fed,” when they have no way to either get warm or be fed James asks, ‘what good is that?’

Or what good is that kind of WORKLESS faith?

¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

It is a Bentham kind of faith. Dead.

Or in other words, you faith is as empty and dead as your words to that person in need. Get this, if we know of people in our church community and consistently do nothing to help when we can—this is evidence of a faith that is not faith at all.

No Faith is a WORKLESS faith.

James is NOT saying people shouldn’t work. They should. James is not condoning laziness.

He IS saying,

Authentic faith in Christ is evidenced by offering aid to those who need it.

I have seen you do this Center Church. And I love it. Love it. You know what I love most? I love the fact that none of it was my idea. As a pastor I love watching you—

- Feed shut-ins
- Reach out
- Send money in

I am proud to be associated with you. Proud.

This pandemic is the perfect opportunity to help people in our church community. None of us are going to be flawless in our help, but can I suggest that one way we can help others is by reaching out and checking on people as you think about them?

Hey. You good? Need anything?

WORKLESS FAITH IS NO FAITH AT ALL.

DEMONIC faith is also NO FAITH AT ALL.

That sounds creepy, and strange. And it has nothing to do with being possessed by a demon.

What is he saying?

Vs. 18,

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”

They are sobering because he is saying something like this:

- You say you believe that there is one God—good, so do the demons.
- You say you believe Jesus is the true and only Son of God—good, so do the demons.
- You say you believe Jesus is enthroned—good, so do the demons.
- You say you believe Jesus died for sinners—good, so do the demons.
- You say you believe God is three and one—good, so do the demons.

How sobering is that?

You see, they have all been to the best divinity school in the universe. They lived with God and his host before turning their backs on him.

Do you see what he is saying?

Believing rightly is not enough. The demons do believe the right things but it doesn't impact their eternal destiny. Theirs is a dead faith.

Maybe you are one who says—I may not know all sorts of theology—but I have had an experience with God in the past. I'm sure I'm okay.

Really?

¹⁹You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”

The Demons shudder at the awareness of who God is. That experience is NO ground of salvation. Do you see what this means?

- You say you have prayed and someone was healed—the demons shudder.
- You say you felt the presence of God before—the demons shudder.
- You say you have been baptized—the demons shudder.
- You say you have prayed to God—the demons shudder.

Do you see?

The Demons believe the right things, respect God but do not obey him.

So there are two kinds of Pseudo-faiths that do not save anyone.

Workless Faith

Demonic Faith

PROP: Authentic faith is made clear by the life you live.

Or do you have?

Workless Faith

Demonic Faith

There are only two kind of people in the world, Christians and non-Christians. And the takeaway for each of these groups is different.

Non-Christian

Your unbelief is made clear by your life. It is easy to say that you believe in Jesus but if your life does not reflect it, you should respond today.

Some signs that your faith might be dead—

- You primarily think about yourself.
 - You wonder what others think of you.
 - You brood over things done to you.
- You don't serve anyone else that is not family.
- You can describe who Jesus is, but he doesn't really direct—
 - Who you sleep with.
 - How you spend your money
 - How you treat those in need

If you have a dead faith—come to the living Savior and ask for forgiveness and help.

Christians—

All of us have deadness to cut out. If you feel that, it is conviction.

Condemnation says something like, you are a complete failure and God is disappointed.

Conviction is from the Holy Spirit.
Condemnation is from the Evil One.

Conviction brings hope.
Condemnation brings despair.

If you are convicted—go to your savior and ask for forgiveness. He is gracious. He is kind. He is the only one who put 100% faith in his father. He is the only one whose words and life were perfectly paired.

He is our substitute BUT ALSO he is our strength.

PRAY

