

**Ecclesiastes 5:18-20** <sup>18</sup>This is what I have observed to be good: that it is appropriate for a person to eat, to drink and to find satisfaction in their toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given them-for this is their lot. <sup>19</sup>Moreover, when God gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and be happy in their toil-this is a gift of God. <sup>20</sup>They seldom reflect on the days of their life, because God keeps them occupied with gladness of heart.

**James 2:14-20** <sup>14</sup>What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup>Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup>If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup>In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. <sup>18</sup>But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds." Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. <sup>19</sup>You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-and shudder. <sup>20</sup>You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

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LABOR DAY IS A WONDERFUL NATIONAL HOLIDAY FOR THOSE WHO WORK FOR A LIVING AT JOBS IN PLACES THAT CLOSE ON THE FIRST MONDAY OF SEPTEMBER.

IT IS, AS WE KNOW, OFFICIALLY A SECULAR HOLIDAY AND NOT A RELIGIOUS ONE.

HOWEVER, IF WE THINK ABOUT IT, WE WILL DISCOVER THAT LABOR DAY CAN ALSO BE A DAY TO HONOR THE LORD OUR GOD.

THE OPENING VERSES OF SCRIPTURE INTRODUCE US TO GOD AS CREATOR.

THEREFORE IT COULD BE SAID THAT GOD WAS THE FIRST LABORER.

REMEMBER, CREATION TOOK WORK, SO MUCH WORK THAT GOD RESTED FOR A DAY AFTER COMPLETING THE TASK.

AND IF WE BELIEVE WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS IN GENESIS CHAPTER ONE, ABOUT MAN AND WOMAN BEING MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD, WE CAN ALSO CONCLUDE WE ARE MEANT TO WORK.

IN FACT, BEING STEWARDS OF THE REST OF CREATION, AS WELL AS TENDING THE GARDEN WERE TASKS GOD ASSIGNED US LONG BEFORE MAN AND WOMAN SINNED.

HOWEVER, IN THE ANCIENT WORLD THE IDEA OF WORK BEING A GOOD THING WAS NOT GENERALLY EMBRACED.

THE GREEKS THOUGHT OF WORK AS BEING DEMEANING. THE FAMOUS POET HOMER, WROTE THAT "WORK WAS THE CURSE OF THE GODS".

AND YET, THE BIBLE TELLS US THAT WORK IS A BLESSING, BECAUSE IT REFLECTS GOD'S IMAGE.

HOWEVER, WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT WORK OR LABOR, INCLUDES NOT JUST THINGS WE GET PAID FOR BUT ALL KINDS OF WORK, INCLUDING DAILY TASKS OF CLEANING, COOKING, YARD WORK, ETC.

AFTER ALL, GOD NEVER GOT PAID ANY MONEY FOR HIS WORK AS CREATOR, NOR ALL OF HIS CONTINUING LABOR.

THIS BRINGS US TO THE READING FROM ECCLESIASTES, WHICH CONFIRMS THE VALUE OF OUR WORK IN THE EYES OF GOD.

WORK, LIKE LIFE ITSELF IS MEANT TO BE ENJOYED. AT THE VERY LEAST WE CAN TAKE SATISFACTION IN FINISHING A TASK, EVEN WHEN IT IS NOT WHAT WE LIKE TO DO.

AND, AS I MENTIONED IN THE CHILDREN'S SERMON, JESUS WAS ALSO A LABORER.

FIRST HE WORKED AS A CARPENTER, TO MAKE A LIVING. THEN HE WORKED AS A TEACHER AND HEALER. JESUS DID THAT WORK WITHOUT MATERIAL COMPENSATION.

THUS HE BLESSED BOTH THE LABOR WE DO TO MAKE A LIVING, AS WELL AS THE WORK WE DO WITHOUT PAY.

FOR CHRISTIANS, OUR LABOR BOTH PAID AND UNPAID IS MEANT TO BE DONE IN SERVICE TO THE LORD.

FROM THE BOOK OF DANIEL, WE HAVE AN EXAMPLE OF HOW IN OUR DAILY LABOR WE CAN STILL SERVE GOD.

DANIEL WAS A CAPTIVE IN BABYLON, WHO ROSE TO BE AN OFFICIAL IN THE COURT OF TWO DIFFERENT PAGAN KINGS.

AND YET IN HIS GOVERNMENT WORK, DANIEL WAS A MAN WHO HONORED THE GOD OF ISRAEL, EVEN WHEN DOING SO BECAME ILLEGAL.

KING DARIUS CALLED DANIEL A “SERVANT OF THE LIVING GOD”, RATHER THAN HIS OWN SERVANT.

IT IS THIS KIND OF LABOR FOR THE LORD THE APOSTLE JAMES HAD IN MIND WHEN HE INSTRUCTED CHRISTIANS TO DO MORE THAN SIMPLY SAY “I BELIEVE IN JESUS AS SAVIOR.”

YES INDEED, JAMES MADE IT VERY CLEAR THAT SAVING FAITH REQUIRES WORKS.

AND THIS HAS CAUSED MUCH DISMAY OVER THE CENTURIES, AMONG BOTH THEOLOGIAN AND ORDINARY CHRISTIANS.

THE PROBLEM IS THAT THE WRITINGS OF THE APOSTLE JAMES SEEM TO CONTRADICT THOSE OF THE APOSTLE PAUL.

JAMES WROTE “CAN FAITH SAVE YOU?”-- IN SUCH A WAY AS TO SUGGEST THE CORRECT ANSWER IS “NO”.

BUT PAUL WROTE- “BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED BY FAITH. AND THIS IS A GIFT OF GOD....”

WHAT WE HAVE HERE IS A KIND OF BIBLICAL BOXING MATCH BETWEEN THESE TWO SERVANTS OF THE LORD.

IN ONE CORNER IS THE CHAMPION, “SAVED BY FAITH, PAUL”, AND IN THE OTHER CORNER IS THE CHALLENGER, “SHOW ME YOUR WORKS, JAMES.”

THESE TWO OPPONENTS HAVE BEEN BATTLING IT OUT, IN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF CHRISTIANS EVER SINCE THE NEW TESTAMENT WAS WRITTEN.

WHILE EACH HAVE WON SOME ROUNDS, NEITHER HAS KNOCKED THE OTHER OUT, AND SO THE FIGHT GOES ON.

THIS IS ONE WAY TO VIEW THE WRITINGS OF THESE TWO APOSTLES.

THERE IS HOWEVER, ANOTHER WAY TO LOOK AT WHAT SEEMS, TO MANY PEOPLE, TO BE TWO “DIFFERENT CORNERS” OF CHRISTIANITY.

ANOTHER PREACHER DESCRIBES THE ALTERNATIVE UNDERSTANDING IN THIS WAY:

“...PAUL AND JAMES ARE NOT STANDING FACE TO FACE FIGHTING EACH OTHER, BUT THEY ARE STANDING BACK TO BACK, FIGHTING OPPOSITE ENEMIES.”

IN OTHER WORDS, THEY ARE NOT SPEAKING TO EACH OTHER, BUT ARE EACH ADDRESSING SPECIFIC PROBLEMS AMONG THE FIRST RECIPIENTS OF THEIR LETTERS.

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THEM COULD BE DESCRIBED BY SAYING THAT PAUL FOCUSED ON THE ROOT OF SALVATION, AND JAMES ON THE FRUIT OF SALVATION.

PAUL WROTE TO ADDRESS ISSUES AMONG CHRISTIANS WHO EITHER THOUGHT, OR WERE BEING TAUGHT, THAT FAITH IN JESUS AS LORD AND SAVIOR WAS NOT ENOUGH.

INSTEAD, ALL CHRISTIANS, INCLUDING GENTILES, HAD TO ALSO FOLLOW THE JEWISH DIETARY AND OTHER LAWS IN ORDER TO BE SAVED.

PAUL’S POINT WAS THAT THE “WORKS OF THE LAW” DO NOT SAVE ANYONE.

HE INSISTED WE ARE SAVED BY GOD’S GRACE AND CHRIST’S WORK OF DYING ON THE CROSS, NOT OUR OWN WORKS.

PAUL WAS WRITING TO CHRISTIANS WHO WERE SEEKING TO SHORE UP THEIR SALVATION BY FOLLOWING THE LAW OF MOSES, AS A KIND OF INSURANCE IF FAITH ALONE SHOULD FAIL.

BUT THE PEOPLE TO WHOM JAMES WROTE WERE MORE LIKE THOSE ABOUT WHOM JESUS SAID IN MATTHEW 7:21

“NOT EVERYONE WHO SAYS TO ME ‘LORD, LORD’, WILL ENTER THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN; BUT THOSE WHO DO THE WILL OF MY FATHER.

THE POINT JAMES WAS MAKING IS THAT THE CHRISTIAN FAITH CANNOT BE MERELY LIP SERVICE, BUT NEEDS TO BE DEMONSTRATED BY OUR ACTIONS.

HOW WE TREAT PEOPLE, ESPECIALLY THOSE DIFFERENT FROM US, OR THOSE WE DISLIKE, MATTERS.

HIS STATEMENT THAT “FAITH WITHOUT WORKS, IS DEAD”, SUMS UP THE ISSUE, BY NAMING OF THE PROBLEM OF FALSE PIETY WITHIN SOME OF THOSE TO WHOM HE WROTE.

FOR JAMES, FAITH AND WORKS ARE LIKE THE TWO BEAMS OF CHRIST’S CROSS.

FAITH IS ONE, AND WORKS IS THE OTHER. AND NAILED TO EACH OF THEM IS JESUS, HIS HANDS TO ONE BEAM, AND HIS FEET TO THE OTHER.

THUS JAMES INSTRUCTS CHRISTIANS THAT REAL FAITH WILL INEVITABLY LEAD US TO DO WORKS THAT REFLECT THE LOVE OF JESUS.

FAITH INFLUENCES NOT JUST WHAT WE DO, BUT ALSO HOW WE DO OUR WORK-PAID AND UNPAID. CONVERSELY OUR ACTIONS REVEAL OUR FAITH, OR LACK OF IT.

HERE IS A STORY THAT MAY BE HELPFUL: IN THE EARLY 1900’S, OPERA TENOR ENRICO CARUSO BECAME THE FIRST PERSON TO SELL OVER A MILLION RECORDS.

THIS MEANS, HIS VOICE WAS WELL KNOWN, EVEN BETTER KNOWN THAN HIS FACE.

ONE DAY CARUSO WALKED FROM THE METROPOLITAN OPERA IN NYC, TO A NEARBY BANK, TO CASH A CHECK.

WHEN THE TELLER READ THE NAME ON THE CHECK SHE REFUSED TO CASH IT BECAUSE THE TELLER DID NOT BELIEVE THE MAN COULD BE THE FAMOUS SINGER.

NOTHING CARUSO SAID WOULD CONVINCING THE TELLER OF HIS IDENTITY.

FINALLY, HE PAUSED, TOOK A DEEP BREATH, AND BEGAN TO SING. ABOUT A MINUTE LATER THE TELLER COUNTED OUT THE MONEY.

YOU SEE, CARUSO PROVED HE WAS WHO HE CLAIMED TO BE BY THE “WORK” OF SINGING.

SIMILARLY ANYONE CAN CLAIM TO BE A CHRISTIAN, BUT JAMES SAYS WE MUST ALSO BE ABLE TO BACK UP THAT CLAIM BY ACTUALLY FOLLOWING JESUS, DOING HIS WORK.

THE APOSTLE PAUL ACTUALLY WROTE SOMETHING THAT AGREES WITH THE ARGUMENT JAMES MAKES ABOUT FAITH AND WORKS.

IN 1 CORINTHIANS 13, PAUL DECLARED: “IF I SPEAK IN THE TONGUE OF HUMANS AND OF ANGELS, BUT DO NOT HAVE LOVE, I AM LIKE A NOISY GONG OR CLANGING CYMBAL.”

FURTHERMORE, SCRIPTURE TELLS US THAT JESUS’ FOLLOWERS WILL BE KNOWN BY THEIR FRUITS.

IN OTHER WORDS OUR LIVES WILL DEMONSTRATE THE FAITH WE CONFESS, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT’S PRESENCE WITHIN US.

AND WE SHOULD REMEMBER THE WORKS OF FAITH ARE NOT JUST “RELIGIOUS” ACTIONS, LIKE GIVING TO CHARITY, OR VOLUNTEERING AT CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS/CAUSES.

WORKS THAT SHOW FAITH ARE MEANT TO BE PART OF OUR EVERYDAY LIVES, OUR DAILY LABOR IN AND OUTSIDE THE HOME, AS WELL AS IN WHAT IS CALLED THE "WORKPLACE".

THE MESSAGE: "YOU HAVE FAITH AND I HAVE WORKS. SHOW ME YOUR FAITH APART FROM YOUR WORKS, AND I BY MY WORKS WILL SHOW YOU MY FAITH"--IS ALL ENCOMPASSING.

THE POINT JAMES WAS MAKING IS THAT IF WE CLAIM TO HAVE FAITH IN GOD'S MERCY AND LOVE THROUGH CHRIST, BUT DO NOT OURSELVES SHOW MERCY AND LOVE TO OTHERS, SUCH FAITH HAS NO SUBSTANCE.

THUS JAMES ENCOURAGES HIS READERS TO SEEK, SO THEY MAY FIND, GENUINE FAITH IN CHRIST AS SAVIOR.

AN ILLUSTRATION OF THIS IS FOUND IN A STORY ABOUT TWO MEN IN A ROWBOAT WHO WERE DISCUSSING FAITH AND WORKS.

THE MAN WHO WAS ROWING INSISTED THAT BOTH ARE EQUALLY NECESSARY, BUT THE OTHER DISAGREED.

FINALLY THE ROWER TOLD HIS PASSENGER THAT HIS OARS HAD NAMES, ONE WAS CALLED "FAITH", AND THE OTHER WAS CALLED "WORKS."

IN FACT, HE SHOWED THE OTHER MAN THE INSCRIPTION OF THE NAMES, ONE ON EACH OAR.

THEN HE PUT THE OAR CALLED FAITH DOWN AND ROWED ONLY WITH THE ONE CALLED WORKS.

OF COURSE THE BOAT WENT AROUND IN A CIRCLE. THE MAN THEN SWITCHED OARS AND THE BOAT CIRCLED IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION.

ONLY WHEN HE TOOK UP BOTH OARS AND USED THEM TOGETHER DID THE BOAT MOVE FORWARD.

HE TOLD HIS COMPANION THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS LIKE A ROWBOAT, WE NEED BOTH THE OARS OF FAITH AND WORKS, IF WE ARE TO GET ANYWHERE.

THE MAN SUMMARIZED HIS POINT SAYING: "GENUINE FAITH RESULTS IN DEEDS. BOTH PULLING TOGETHER WILL ALWAYS MAKE FOR SAFETY, PROGRESS, AND BLESSING."

WHAT DOES ALL THIS MEAN IN PRACTICAL TERMS? HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES:

WORK THAT REFLECTS FAITH CAN BE FOUND IN HOW WE TREAT OTHERS, ESPECIALLY WHEN WE DO NOT FEEL WELL OR ARE IN A BAD MOOD.

SOMETIMES PEOPLE TAKE OUT ON OTHERS SOMETHING HAPPENING WITHIN THEMSELVES.

FAITH CALLS US TO SEEK GOD'S HELP, WHEN NECESSARY, TO ALWAYS ACT TOWARDS OTHERS IN A CHRIST-LIKE WAY. AND FAITH CALLS US TO REPENT WHEN WE FAIL.

THEN THERE IS THE LABOR WE DO TO MAKE A LIVING. WORKING OUT OF FAITH IN CHRIST MEANS DOING OUR BEST, EVEN AT JOBS WE DO NOT LIKE, OR AMONG PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT PLEASANT FOR US TO BE AROUND.

A REAL CHALLENGE TO OUR FAITH-WORK IS TO NOT RESPOND INSULT FOR INSULT, OR BETTER YET TO HELP A CO-WORKER WITH A TASK EVEN IF HE OR SHE DOES NOT DESERVE HELP.

THE WORK WE DO, BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE WHERE WE LIVE, CAN ALSO BE A WAY TO LIVE OUT FAITH.

THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE WHEN IT COMES TO TASKS WE DO NOT ENJOY. DOING OUR CHORES AT HOME IS A WAY TO CARE FOR THOSE WE LIVE WITH.

AND FOR THOSE WHO LIVE ALONE, WORKING OUTSIDE-WE SHOW CARE FOR NEIGHBORS BY KEEPING OUR PLACE LOOKING NICE.

AND INSIDE OUR HOME, WE CARE FOR OURSELVES BY DOING THE TASKS THAT NEED TO BE DONE.

IN ALL THESE WAYS, AND MANY MORE, WE CAN LABOR FOR THE LORD, AND SHOW OUR FAITH IN OUR WORKS. AMEN

SERMON SUMMARY: JAMES 2:14-20

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