

Metho-huh? Week 5: *Faith and Works*

Scripture

James 1:19-27

You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act—they will be blessed in their doing. If any think they are religious, and do not bridle their tongues but deceive their hearts, their religion is worthless. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.

Matthew 7:15-27

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the 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. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.' "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!"

Questions:

- 1.) The book of James, often attributed to Jesus' brother James as the author, has seemingly different themes than Paul's Epistles. Generally speaking, Paul writes much of justification by grace, and other themes such as Christ's death and resurrection. James focuses on a different aspect of Christian life by writing of the importance of actions. Would Paul disagree with James?
- 2.) Martin Luther called the book of James an example of making a house out of straw. His strong reaction was likely from the corruption of the Catholic Church's selling of indulgences. This "work" was clearly a misuse of authority and taking advantage of others. Where might we see a similar taking advantage of people in the church today: Catholic, Protestant, or otherwise?
- 3.) John Wesley balanced the faith and works debate by looking at the totality of scripture. Sanctification makes sense of it. God's Grace, which is a free gift for all, justifies us. Our works of compassion regenerate us in the Christian life. How can we prevent our works from turning into acts of oppression such as the selling of indulgences of Luther's time?
- 4.) Wesley gave away his Oxford professor's salary to the poor. He believed that acts of compassion are to be a habit of the Christian life, on the same level as prayer, worship, and reading the Bible. These acts of compassion are to be sacrificial, done in secret, and spiritual as it is to be dedicated to God. This does not seem easy! What are our struggles in honoring all three of those criteria?
- 5.) Pastor Sandy said that a person shows her true colors when showing compassion. Our Pastor challenged us to serve more by doing these things for our Shared Breakfast and serving at the Blaine Center. What compassionate acts might we be called to for this small group?

O Holy God, We thank you for your giving of new life by means of the Holy Spirit working in us and through us as we serve. What are you calling me to do? Open our senses to hear You and give us strength and willpower to follow through. In Jesus' name, Amen.