

February 25, 2018

"Consider it pure joy..."

"What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith, but has no deeds? Can such a faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well: keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action is dead...You see a person is justified by what he does and not by faith alone..."

James 2:14-24

What is faith? Most of us would use the word "belief" to define faith, but in fact, faith is so much more than just belief. Sadly, many believers do not understand this difference. Belief means that we have accepted something as true even though our acceptance may well not change our existence at all. I believe that the Earth orbits around the Sun, but that belief does not really impact my life at all, does it? If I chose to believe that the Sun orbited the Earth as some did centuries ago, that too would have little impact on my life.

Faith, on the other hand, is a belief that absolutely has to change who I am and how I behave. If I have faith that using a diffuser filled with essential oils in my house will protect me against the flu virus then I will have my diffuser running twenty-four/seven. True faith will always change who I am and how I behave.

I am convinced that there are a lot of Christian believers in the world. National and international surveys continually tell me that this is so. I am not so convinced that there are all that many people of faith in the world. Why not? Not to be critical, but I do not see the signs of faith demonstrated in the lives of a lot of folks who claim to be believers.

If I am a person of faith, then that faith must alter the way I live before the world. True faith will be obvious in everything I do and say. If I have placed my faith in Jesus Christ then that faith will change who I am and what I do. It has to.

Faith in Jesus Christ will demand that I am constantly working to deny myself and to surrender my very existence to the absolute control of the Master. (John 13:34-35) My faith, if it is true faith, will color every response and every behavior. My faith will dictate my positions on every issue. If someone asks me what I believe about any issue my faith will dictate my answer and my resulting actions.

True faith is always transformative. Simple belief seldom is. If my Lord tells me not to judge then I will not judge. If my Lord tells me to treat all men as I would like to be treated then that is my standard of conduct. If my Master tells me not to worry then I will not worry. That's how faith works.

I can believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that belief will not change my life any more than my belief that the Earth orbits the Sun. James will assure us that even demons believe that there is a God, but their belief does not change who they are. (James 2:19) But if I have faith in Jesus Christ and not just belief, then I will be forced to surrender my all to him, allowing him to transform my very nature.

Our faith is demonstrated, James will tell us, not just in our words, but in our deeds as well. Our attitudes and actions must reflect our faith if our faith is real. Every great Biblical hero





demonstrates this truth. Noah believed that God would flood the earth and destroy all life. How can we tell? Noah spent 100 years building an ark because he believed, he had faith, that what God told him was real and true.

Abraham, Moses, David, Samuael and all of the great Biblical heros had faith and their faith controlled their attitudes and actions. Sometimes their faith was realized within their lifetime and sometimes it was not, but every one of them had faith. The Hebrew author writes, *"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see...And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he eists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."* (Hebrews 11:1-6)

So, here's the tough question we must all ask ourselves: Am I satisfied with a belief that God is real, or do I have an overwhelming and life changing faith that God is real? The answer will be found in my actions and attitudes.