

# Rich in Faith

## James 2:1-17

### Introduction

Back when he was still the Vice-President of the United States, George H. W. Bush met with four famous pastors in the library of his home in Washington D.C. One of those pastors asked Mr. Bush to “tell us about your faith.”

He responded, “I’ll tell you very clearly. I believe that my only hope of heaven is the fact that Jesus died for me on the cross. I have put my faith in Jesus Christ and I am trusting Him to get me to heaven because He died for me and paid for my sins on the cross.”

That pastor followed up with a second question. “If you were to stand before God and He were to say to you, ‘Why should I let you into My heaven?’ what would you say to Him?”

Bush answered, “I would tell Him, I’ve trusted Jesus Christ as my personal Lord and Savior. I would also tell Him that I have endeavored to live by the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount.”

The pastor objected. “But, Mr. Vice President, keeping the Ten Commandments and living by the Sermon on the Mount have nothing to do with it. You are saved by the grace of God.”

George Bush said, “I understand that, but I am going to disagree with you. Do you mean to tell me that it is possible for a man to say that he believes in God and that it won’t change his life? I believe when a man is truly a Christian, it will show up in the way he lives his life. You will be able to see it.”

The kind of faith that Mr. Bush was talking about is what James calls a “rich faith.”

*Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith ...? (James 2:5)*

It is a “rich faith” because it is a full and complete faith – a faith that is more than something that happens in the head or in the heart. A rich faith consumes all of who we are, so much so that people around us know that we have something special at work within us.

The richness of your faith is seen in how you ...

### #1: View Others (vv. 1-4)



For James, the presenting issue was one of economics: rich and poor. The wealthier members of the congregation were receiving preferential treatment, often to the embarrassment of the less wealthy. That's a 2000-year old problem the church continues to face in many segments of our world.

James could have used any number of other issues. When the Apostle Paul was challenging the same attitude, he identified three other sets of people:

*So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:26-28)*

James is fairly blunt when he offers his opinion of such preferential treatment, isn't he?

*If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes ... have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2:3-4)*

James knows that Jesus died for both rich and poor, and that Jesus saw no difference between the two. Both rich and poor need a Savior. Both men and women need a Savior. Both Jew and Gentile, both slave and free – all are the same – they are one – in Christ Jesus.

That phrase in the quoted verse from James is fascinating: “judges with evil thoughts.” Literally that means “a person whose judgment can't be trusted.” In other words, they don't get it. People who draw such distinctions within the Body of Christ have no understanding of the Christian faith.

But when you can look at people and see each of them as someone that Jesus loves so much that He was willing to die for them ... your faith becomes richer and it shows up in how you treat them. And they know it.

The richness of your faith is also seen in how you ...

## **#2: View Obedience**

Look at verse 12:

*Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom ... (James 2:12)*

We tend, don't we, to think of laws as restrictions, but James calls upon us to see God's law as something that gives us freedom!

One of the great joys of being a grandfather is that you get to watch your kids attempt to discipline their own children. I got to spend time with my soon-to-be two year old granddaughter Allie last weekend. Allie was jumping on the couch, and her daddy told her not to do that. So she did it again. And this time, when he told her not to jump on the couch he put her on the floor surrounded by lots of toys. Instead of jumping, he told her, she could play. And so she ... crawled back on the couch and started to jump.

All the freedom offered by those toys ... but she only heard the restriction!

The same thing happened in the Garden of Eden. God said:

*You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die. (Genesis 2:16-17)*

The freedom of dining! But all they saw was the singular restriction. *I want the one I can't have.*

When you are able to look at God's commandments and see in them the way to living a life that is blessed by God – and you choose to live that way rather than striving to get the things God says are not pleasing to Him ... then your life takes on an aura of goodness and mercy and grace, your faith grows richer and deeper. The people around you begin to notice a qualitative difference about you. They see it.

Finally the richness of your faith is seen in how you ...

### **#3: View Opportunities**

Throughout the history of Christianity, people have been guilty of trying to win God's favor by the things they do. Churches have often been complicit in that error, because the institution needs people to do things. The formula looks like this:

I serve God ∴ God loves me.

But that is the wrong formula. It should be this one:

God loves me ∴ I serve Him.

Steve Schumacher, Pastor Powell and I had the opportunity to hear a wonderful Roman Catholic lay person speak at the NALC convocation a few weeks ago. Sherry Weddel is leading a major disciple-making effort in the Catholic church, helping people to see, among other things, that the way in which they serve flows out of the relationship they have with God. Sherry shared this story (which is also in one of her books):

*I found myself listening to a woman who was president of a large local Catholic women's group... Her stories were so vague that I wasn't hearing any evidence*

*of a faith that was personal... So I asked her "Could you briefly describe to me your relationship with God to this point in your life?"*

*After thinking carefully for a few moments, she responded briskly, "I don't have a relationship with God." Her answer stunned me. My first thoughts were, "That's not possible. You are a leader in your parish. You have been active in your parish for years. You wouldn't do that that without some kind of a relationship with God. You must not have understood my question."*

*So I spent the rest of the hour approaching the issue of a relationship with God from every perspective I could think of. By the end of the interview, I realized that she had accurately described her spiritual reality... Her activity was devoid of spiritual motivation.*

You can serve in the hope that God will love you, and you will soon feel like you are just going through the motions. Because that is all you are doing. OR you can realize that God already loves you and start to serve as a response to His incredible love. When you do it that way, you will discover that your faith develops a richness that is fulfilling and powerfully meaningful to those around you. They will see Christ in you.

(Commercial)

#### **APPLICATION**

Throughout this month of September, our congregation will be challenged over and over again to respond to the wonderful love of our Savior by the ways in which we give and live. These are the four T's of stewardship (time, talent, treasure and testimony).

Lord speak to us so that we can then respond faithfully.

Amen.