

JAMES RESHUFFLED
Faith IS A Verb
Mother's Day, May 12, 2018

In the town I grew up in it wasn't unusual to see a church on every corner.



Now I went to the Baptist church.

I remember feeling sorry for the Presbyterians down the street

They were wrong about so many things.

We wouldn't have thought of doing any joint youth activities.

We might get corrupted.

Oh, and I would never go into a catholic church,

And I'll bet many of you who grew up catholic were warned against worshipping
in a non-Catholic church.

It's the way it was.

If I asked you, "What faith are you?" I'd be expecting you to tell me
what your religion was, or what church you went to.

We were so busy arguing about the nuances of our "faith"
that we were slicing up the body of Christ into tiny factions.

I can remember we weren't really sure what to do with the book of James.
It seemed a little heretical.

Did you know that Martin Luther hated the book of James.

he did *not* want it included in the Bible?

But it still made the cut, and it has soo much to teach us about FAITH.

Basically, James says – **FAITH IS A VERB!**

If we don't get this right, we'll be going about our business
presuming God is so happy with us,

and we won't even realize we're not in the ball park.

So, James, tell us what people of faith look like.

James 1:25

Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is **worthless**.

That's a bit harsh.

We'll, the tongue is a BIG topic in James,

and we're going to give devote a whole Sunday to it a ways down the road,
but for today, just note,

“If you don't control your tongue, your religion is **WORTHLESS**.”

OK, what else, James? **(2:14-17)**

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?
Can such faith save them?

Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food.

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?

In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is **dead**.

There it is.

If your doctrine doesn't lead to right living . . . it's **DEAD** and **WORTHLESS**.

Here's James' point . . . **(2:18-19)**

Someone will say, “You have faith (as in “statement of beliefs”); I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.

You believe that there is one God. Good for you!

Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

So your theology is better than the church down the street?

Woohoo!

You can show me your Articles of Faith,

and I'll show *you* I'm living out the **ONE ROYAL LAW OF LOVE**,
and we'll see who God accepts.

James 1:27 couldn't be more clear.

Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this:
to look after orphans and widows in their distress

Orphans and widows means those have absolutely nothing to give you in return.

When James says, “Let me see your faith.”

He’s not asking us to show him our Articles of Faith.

While those an important place,

They are only your professed beliefs –

The things you *say* you believe

and probably *think* you believe.

But what you *DO* reveals what you actually believe.

And so James says,

²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

OK, here’s some examples.

First, James holds up the *actions* of an honored patriarch.

²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

Next, James holds up the *actions* of a prostitute. (*You’ve gotta love it!*)

I’m sure the startling contrast was quite intentional

²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

But today being Mother’s Day,

I want to hold up the actions of a *Mother* to teach us how Faith is a Verb.

Meet the Canaanite Woman of Matthew 15

who brings an impassioned request to Jesus.

VIDEO – The Canaanite Woman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEW-kVjHIFY&t=24s>

This woman is one tenacious mother,

Let’s see how Jesus refines and strengthens her faith
at each moment of decision.

As the story opens there is nothing about this mother that suggests
she would be an exemplar of faith.

Before she opens her mouth, she faces a huge strike against her

She is a Canaanite Woman.

A Canaanite in Jewish territory is out of her element!
She knows people will say, "Hey, you don't belong here.
"You'd better know your place!"

A Canaanite approaching a Jewish rabbi?
A huge violation of social norms.

And . . . she's a WOMAN in a male dominated society
Any woman approaching a Jewish rabbi
Was even a bigger violation of social norms.

So, before she even *approaches* Jesus, her faith is tested.
We'll go to great lengths to keep our respectability intact.

She had to ask herself, "Just how badly do I want my daughter to be healed?
Just how badly do *you* want what you *think* is your heart's desire?
"Do you want this enough to defy social norms and risk losing your respectability?"

For most of us our faith stops right there.
But how about our mother?

A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out,
"Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!
My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly."

Her faith proves stronger than her desire for respectability,

Next test: ²³ *Jesus did not answer a word.*
Jesus completely ignores. The silent treatment ~ Strike 2

Have you ever asked the Lord for something, and he says and does *nothing*?
Why would he do that? Consider:

How many of our prayers are passing whims?
We want one thing today, and something else tomorrow.
Can you imagine the mess we'd be in if God gave us everything we asked for?

One day you pray, "Oh, Lord, please give me this job!"
The next day you pray, "Lord get me *out* of this job."
One day you pray, "Please give me this marriage!"
The next day (or let's give it a couple of years) and you're praying,
"Lord, get me *out* of this marriage."

If God ignores us for a while,
it will naturally filter out many of our fickle prayers,
and sort out our doublemindedness.

But this mother's desire and faith has moved beyond whim,
Cause she's still a comin'.

So his disciples came to him and urged him,
"Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us."
She's making a nuisance of herself!

OK, now she's provoked open conflict. Strike 3

I hate conflict. I love peace. (my *prayer?*)
Rarely do the outcomes we desire arrive without conflict.
I have to ask myself,
"Is my desire and my faith strong enough to withstand the inevitable conflict?
Am I willing to rock the boat and get everyone mad at me if necessary.

How about you? Is this where your faith takes a back seat?
Can conflict get you to go back into the shadows?

Apparently, our mother's faith passed this test, cause she just keeps on a comin'

Then Jesus answered

²⁴ He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

²⁶ . . . "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Sounds pretty rude.

What's going on here?

Jesus is saying,

"You have no grounds to demand this (or anything) from me."

You do understand that I don't *owe* this to you."

Stike 4!

(OK, so I don't know a lot about baseball! – just taking a little creative liberty here.)

You know what I think Jesus is doing here?

He's checking for a sense of entitlement!

Do we ever need to hear this one –

Americans, American Christians, the generation we have raised.

We need to hear: God doesn't owe us.

We don't control God.

We don't control outcomes.

Faith isn't the nifty magic wand we use to convince God to give us what we want.

If God gave us what we asked for just because
we persisted or
because we prayed loud and long with lots of emotion,
we would become unbearably arrogant.

This mother's last hurdle in her faith journey was to
surrender all sense of entitlement.

What will faith DO here?

This mother gets down low.

"Yes, Lord, I understand that you have every *right* to say NO.
And sometimes, that is exactly what he says.

Jesus prayed 3 times to have "**May this cup be taken from me.**"

If there was any way to avoid the humiliation, pain and mental agony, he wanted it.
The Father said, no.

Paul: 2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Three different times I begged the Lord to take it away his thorn in the flesh.

Paul wanted to escape the great limitations on his time and ministry,

the pain, the humiliation and the dependency that accompanied such an affliction.

Each time the Lord said, no.

"My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness."

Moses: Deuteronomy 3:23

Moses desperately wanted to go into the promised land.

It would be the culmination of his life's work.

"At that time I pleaded with the Lord and said, 'O Sovereign Lord, . . .

Please let me cross the Jordan to see the wonderful land on the other side. . ."

26 "But the Lord was angry with me because of you, and he would not listen to me. 'That's enough!' he declared. 'Speak of it no more.'"

Do you know what faith does when God says no?

Faith says, "Thy will be done."

Our faith is not in a particular outcome, our faith is in God.

But Jesus has not told her, NO!

He's just making sure she's not approaching him
with the arrogance of entitlement.

And so what does she DO?

She keeps on a comin'
And by faith, she speaks yet again.

²⁷ "Yes, Lord," she said.

"But Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

You gotta love this woman.

I think it was for this woman that the Jews invented the word hutzpah!

²⁸ Then Jesus said to her, with a twinkle in his eye,

"WOW! – You're something else, lady!"

Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.

And her daughter was healed at that moment.

And so this mother gives us today's lesson

FAITH IS A VERB

The faith of which James speaks is:

stronger than our desire for respectability.

It's purified through the test of time

It will not be deterred by conflict

And it always will take NO for an answer.

But in the absence of a NO – it just keeps on a comin'!

May our FAITH propel us into action.

Worship Team

As we sing an affirmation of our faith, listen to the words.

Faith – I can DO all things through Christ.

FAITH IS A VERB.