

James 2:14-17
What Are You Going To Do?
Sunday July 30th, 2017

A story is told of a man who was blissfully and inattentively walking down a trail in the Grand Canyon fully absorbed in the beauty of the place. Suddenly he stumbled over the edge of the trail and caught the only branch sticking out from the side of the cliff.



After desperately looking down the steep cliff he began yelling for help. Well he was about to have a tremendous Kairos moment when he began to shout, *“God, help me!! I will do anything you want, if you only help me!!!”* Definitely he had entered the “Circle of Renewal or Repentance” and was awaiting a word from God.

He cried out again, *“God, help me!! I will do anything you want if you only help me!!!”* Suddenly a voice boomed from heaven, *“Let go of the branch.”* In a split second his mind took him all the way around the circle. He observed God’s word; he reflected on it, he discussed it with himself. He looked for a plan, any other plan, because that steep cliff and the law of gravity seemed to have an inevitable accountability so he acted!

He cried out again, *“Is there anyone else up there?!!!”*

My friends, here we see the most common sticking point between hearing from God and doing what God says. I refer you to the circle on the sermon notes page. The most common sticking point is the division between **repent and believe**. We often hear clearly what God is saying to us, but hesitate at the point where we must plan to act and then act. It is the point at which we hear from God and need to let go of what we cling to, be it our sin, or possessions, or simply a comfortable life in order to obey and have life.

This is the 3rd in the series “The Two Questions” that I ask at the end of most of my sermons, “What is God saying to you?” and “What are you going to do?” You can visual see how these two questions are related to the circle and the Biblical concepts of Repent and Believe on the Sermon Note page in our bulletin.

These are based on Mark 1:15, “The time has come,” Jesus said. “The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!”

Again, briefly reviewing, for those who weren’t here two weeks ago, the “time” Jesus speaks of is “Kairos” time, the time in which God breaks into our world with a message. When we observe that, reflect on that and discuss that we are “repenting” we are turning to God as we hear from God.

But to hear from God and do what God says are two different things. That is why we must “Believe”. We must make a plan to act on what God says, set up a way to hold ourselves accountable to that plan and then we must act.



Belief is the active part of repentance. Faith in the New Testament is not just intellectual belief like a mathematical equation that we know is true, but has little to no impact on how we live our lives. Faith or belief in the New Testament is more like a verb than a noun. We could almost say the call is for “faithing” though in English that is not a real word.

In that in English the word “Believe” can have no activity attached to it leads to confusion when it comes to the practice of our “Faith or Belief”. Some think, once they simply believe that Jesus was raised from the dead, and is their Savior nothing more is needed in order to be one of Jesus’ disciples.

You can believe and then go on to do whatever you want be it sinful or not. There is truth, to all you have to do is “believe”, just look at the example of the Thief on the Cross. He didn’t have any time to do any good works.

But we’re not just about to die, being nailed down to where we can do nothing. We have time, and energy, and talents; so we need to act.

If we have “Belief or Faith” we act. I used this example in my Confirmation classes through the years. You could be standing in the middle of the road with your back to traffic and I could say move there is a car coming. You could believe me, but not move and get run over, or you could have faith and run!!

Faith or belief in the New Testament is active. Last week I mentioned Jesus said in Mt 28:19 **“Teach them to OBEY all I have commanded you.”** He didn’t say “teach them to understand” as in understanding theological concepts and intellectual doctrines and precepts. Jesus want’s his disciples to have an “ethical/moral” approach to life. To have faith or belief is to be ethical and moral.

Jesus reinforced this throughout his teaching and in particular in the 3 parables in Matthew 25: The Talents, the Wise and Foolish Virgins, and the Sheep and the Goats. As Dr. Barclay says, **“There is nothing so dangerous as to be useless in the New Testament.”** In other words Jesus gives us great warning about not using our God giving talents, not doing the good works he has given us to do (the oil in the lamps) and not taking care of the poor, the hungry, the naked, the sick and those in prison. Here’s what he says he wants us to do. Study this picture for a moment.



Revelation 14:13 says, **“Blessed are the dead who from now on die in the Lord.”** **“Yes,”** says the Spirit, **“they will rest from their labors, for their deeds/works follow them.”** In heaven we are depicted in the Bible as wearing white robes.



These white robes are symbols of the good works we have done because of our faith here on earth. Our good works will follow us in that they will be put on us in the form of a white robe washed in the blood of the Lamb.

When you do the works of the Kingdom you enter into the Kingdom. As Jesus says, “The Kingdom is near” and we enter into it when we believe, when we do the good works we were created to do.

Paul said in Eph. 2:8-9 says, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast.”**

James in our reading today says, **“So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”** How can you reconcile these two? Martin Luther could not. He said James was a book of straw and should be tossed from the New Testament. But as you look deeper into what each Apostle wrote, you will see not a contradiction, but that they are speaking in complementary ways about the Christian Faith.

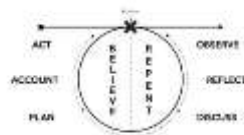
Paul is referencing the beginning of a Christian’s life when they first believe that is a gift. But what is next? James is saying what is next is Faith! Belief and action together are intrinsic to faith. Repent and believe!

“Paul begins at the very beginning. He insists that no one can ever earn the forgiveness of God.” “James begins much later with the professing Christians, those who claim to be already forgiven and in a new relationship with God.” Barclay p. 85 “James”

In Methodist Theology it is the difference between Prevenient or Converting Grace and Sanctifying Grace: grace that makes you Holy.

When you take into account all the moral and ethical teaching of Paul you realize that for him faith was a living, active lifestyle. For Paul “to believe in Jesus meant to take that belief into every section of life and to live by it.” Barclay p. 84 “James”

Now do we at Vista Church “Believe”? Have we heard from God, observed, reflected, discussed, made plans held ourselves accountable and acted? Yes! A definite yes!



We are supporting 152 children in Agua Prieta. We are a church of about 300 members so that means almost ¾ of every single person, or family has taken on helping with the education of a child whose family can't help them.



For Impact Community Food bank we take a monthly offering, which has decreased a bit lately, but I think that is only because it hasn't been lifted up.



But it is how, in response to Jesus, we feed the hungry and we also feed hungry children every week during the school year through the Snack Pack mission. To quote St. James you say you have faith? See our faith!

We are now beginning the process of starting U. M. Fellowships up the Copper Trail. We already had one excursion to check out a town by

a couple of our members that was rained out and many, many ideas have been shared with me.

Please write those ideas down and give them to me or Jim Bleess or send them to me by email. These are the Reflection and Discussion part of the Circle. As we walk around the circle as individuals we also do that as a church and invite others to join us. I want to ask some to pray for this mission daily. Who will that be? (raise your hands) I need a task force to work with me. Who feels called? (raise your hands)

When God speaks, God invites us into a relationship. That is why on the Repent side of the circle we have strands of what I call the “DNA of the Bible” listed as **“Invitation, Relationship and Covenant.”**

We see this in our Mark Scripture that after Jesus began his ministry he invited Simon and Andrew to join him. He invited them into a relationship that eventually brought them into a New Covenant in his blood.

We can and do, do the same. Every Sunday we gather early to greet each other and whoever wanders in in the most friendly and inviting, welcoming manner.

So to spread the joy and relationship we can take some of our best friendly people, stuff their car full of muffins and donuts and a coffee maker and send them up the road to a location with an IT guy to make sure the Live Streaming works. One person said we should take 6 of our friendliest people and a 10 year old to figure out the system and go north.

As I said last week, the why of the Circle of Renewal or Repentance is to make disciples as Jesus did. In other words **in the same way Jesus did through invitation into relationship and then the covenant of his Church.**

And I know to experience some of this and the movement of God with us is to let some things go. What we need to let go, yet, I don't know. But we need to let go of the branch to experience the miracles of God. When we repent and turn to God we turn away from other things.



At one point in my life I served on the Board of the Salvation Army of Southern Arizona and New Mexico. I loved that, not for what I necessarily contributed, but for who I got to hang out with. That Board was made up of all the movers and shakers of Southern Arizona. Well known business men and women, educators, and politicians.

It fed my ego to go to those meetings, but it was eating me alive in terms of time. The Board's busiest times were Christmas and Easter. Guess what; mine too? So I decided I needed to resign; so that I could invest my time more fully into my local church and the huddle groups I was leading.

I went partially round that circle many times over several months telling the members of two huddle groups I was going to resign, but not doing it. I observed God telling me to quit. I reflected on quitting. I discussed it, and discussed it, and discussed it, but couldn't bring myself to do it. I was holding on to the branch.

I made plans about how I would do it but it was only by being held accountable by my huddle groups that I finally made an appointment with the Salvation Army Major and told him I needed to go. He thanked me and I left. I then had the time to address other things that God wanted me to do.



As we repent we turn to God and that naturally turns us away from other things. Sometimes we turn from sin. Sometimes, though, it is a ministry or mission we are led to conclude;... so that something else can begin. As my mom always says, **"All good things must come to an end so that other good things can begin."**

So with that I conclude my sermon with the two questions, "What is God saying and what are you going to do?" Amen