

‘Faith, the fruit of the Spirit’

Each Sunday morning as they began class, the fifth graders would line up and recite their one section of the faith in the order that it was written. That teaching method worked well and went on about four months, until one Sunday. They began the class the same way. The first girl as usual recited her line flawlessly, ‘I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.’ The second, a boy, stood up and said his sentence, ‘I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.’ But then silence descended over the class. Finally, one girl, who felt she had discovered the problem stood up and loudly said, ‘I’m sorry, sir, but the boy who believes in the Holy Spirit is absent today!’

We’re working our way through the nine characteristics and evidences of a Spirit filled life from **Galatians 5:22+23**. And ‘faith’ or ‘faithfulness’ which is the **seventh attribute** of the fruit of the Spirit is what we will be looking at today. I would like us to examine our faith, to see if it’s a living, saving faith which is absent from our lives.

Now we all know that faith is important because **Hebrews 11:6** says, “without faith it is impossible to please God.” But what people tend to forget is that they need the right kind of faith. You can’t just have any old faith and think God will be pleased with you, you need to have the right kind of faith. In the Bible, there are **two** basics types of faith found, there’s a dead faith and a saving faith.

But how can we tell the difference? How do we recognise if our faith is a dead faith or a saving faith? James says in **James 2:19** “you believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.” James has just described to us what dead faith looks like. He says that a dead faith, the faith of the demons, is simply just knowledge of the facts. The demons have knowledge of who God is and who God’s Son is.

They also know and believe Jesus died for the sins of the world, but this is as far as their faith goes. They don’t have saving faith, and because of that they shudder in fear of God and His judgment. Listen loved ones, you can have a knowledge of God and His Son. You might accept that Jesus died for your sins at Calvary. But James says, that type of faith won’t save you, you need to have the type of faith that saves.

Now sadly there are many self-proclaiming Christians who possess this kind of faith and think they’re saved. And one of the main contributors of promoting this type of faith is found in what they call ‘**the sinners prayer**’. People are led to believe they can pray a ‘sinner’s prayer’ anywhere and under any condition to be saved. Many preachers and teachers suggest prayers for sinners to pray, some are several sentences long and some are only one or two sentences.

Let me give you an example, ‘God, I know that I am a sinner. I know that I deserve the consequences of my sin. However, I am trusting in Jesus Christ as my Saviour. I believe that His death and resurrection provided for my forgiveness. I trust in Jesus and Jesus alone as my personal Lord and Saviour. Thank you, Lord, for saving me and forgiving me! Amen!’

The sinner’s prayer, as we know it today, was invented by twentieth century preachers as a quick and easy way to save people. But loved ones, this is simply just practicing a dead faith, because you won’t find in the Bible, one single example of anyone, anywhere saying a prayer to be saved after the cross of Calvary. In other words, just acknowledging that God exists and Jesus died for you, won’t save you.

So, what does saving faith look like? How do we know if we possess this type of faith? Well, to put it simply, saving faith is belief coupled with obedience of acts of faith. Let me give you an example, when Paul was in Philippi, he and Silas were flogged and imprisoned. After the miracle of the earthquake, the jailhouse doors were opened, and everyone’s chains were broken. The jailor was about to kill himself but Paul told him not too, so the jailor calls for the lights to be put on and he fell before Paul and Silas.

Now look at what the jailor asked them in **Acts 16:30**, “sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Now look at Paul’s answer in **Acts 16:31**, Paul answered, “believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household.” Now most people just stop reading when they get to this verse and say, “look, that’s all the jailer had to do to be saved, simply believe in Jesus”. Was Paul commanding them to just believe in Jesus? No! **But how do we know?** Read on.

In **Acts 16:32**, the text goes on to say, “then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house.” Now loved ones, **how does faith come?** **Romans 10:17** “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message.”

The jailer and his household were hearing the message and as a result of hearing that message, their faith was being increased by the word spoken to them. Then **Acts 16:33** says, “**At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptised.**”

Why did the Jailer and his family wash their wounds? This was their act of repentance, they were repenting of their sin of flogging Paul and Silas. By washing their wounds, they were helping the healing process, and so correcting their sin as much as humanly possible.

If simply believing in Jesus is enough to be saved, **why did they repent?** And notice that the verse actually says, **‘they were baptised’**. If simply believing in Jesus is enough to be saved, **why did they get baptised?** Look at the next verse, **Acts 16:34** “**The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household.**”

Luke tells us that the jailer was filled with joy, **but why?** They were filled with joy because their sins were washed away. **But when were their sins washed away? At the point of mere belief?** No, after they heard the word, repented, and were baptised. **Do you see how from that simple belief in Jesus, led them all to believe in God?** In other words, this is saving faith because saving faith always includes acts of obedience.

It was Martin Luther who once said, ‘the true, living faith, which the Holy Spirit instils into the heart, simply cannot be idle.’ Now **Martin Luther** was an interesting character who promoted the idea of **‘faith only’**. And this idea that **‘faith alone’** will save you, is still very popular in Christendom today. But a simple reading of the **Book of James**, quickly puts that theory to death.

James 2:18 “**But someone will say, ‘you have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds.**”

James 2:20 “**You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?**”

James 2:22 “**You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.**”

James 2:24 “**You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.**”

James 2:26 “**As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.**”

An old boatman painted the word **‘faith’** on one oar of his boat and the word **‘works’** on the other. Someone came up to him and asked why he did this and so he gladly went on to show them. He says if I wanted to get across this river, and I just used the oar with the word, **‘faith’** on it, I would go around in circles and get nowhere. And if I only used the oar with the word **‘works’** on it, I would still go around in circles and get nowhere. But when I use them both together, I can get to the other side of the river quiet easily.’

You see loved ones, our faith needs to work with obedience, otherwise we’ll end up just going around in circles. **Luther** tried to ban the **Book of James** from the Bible for obvious reasons, it was against his theology. And James clearly tells us that **‘faith lone’** is a dead faith and won’t save anyone. In other words, if your faith doesn’t involve obedience, your faith won’t please God.

But what exactly is it we’re talking about when we speak of faith? What is faith? Now some people would point us to **Hebrews 11:1** for a definition of faith where the Hebrew writer says, “**Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.**” Now loved ones, this is more of a description of faith, than a definition of faith. From this verse, we learn some more qualities of faith.

For example, within faith, there is substance or a quality of confidence which helps a person to endure, and there is evidence which is proof. In other words, it’s not some **‘leap in the dark’** but it has its foundation in proof. **Psalm 19:1-4** “**The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge. They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them. Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.**” Creation is our evidence and proof that God exists.

So, what is faith? The actual definition of faith is ‘firm persuasion’ or ‘firm conviction based upon being persuaded.’ And within the Scriptures faith is spoken of in four basic ways.

1. Faith used to speak of ‘miraculous faith’. 1 Corinthians 12:8-10 “To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues.”

Now remember these miraculous gifts have all ceased now, but this is the kind of miraculous, mountain moving faith which Jesus spoke about to His disciples in Matthew 17. Matthew 17:20 “Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.” It’s the kind of miraculous, healing faith which James speaks about in James 5:14 “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.”

2. The word faith is used of ‘trust’. In 1 Corinthians 2:5, Paul wrote, “that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.” Paul was speaking about trust, we shouldn’t put our trust in man’s wisdom but in the power of God. This was the biggest problem the Jews had, they trusted in their own wisdom and God ended up leading them into captivity.

3. The word faith is used of ‘trustworthiness’. When Paul wrote to Titus concerning the Christians attitude towards slaves, he says, in Titus 2:10, “show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Saviour attractive.”

The word translated ‘fully trusted’ in this verse could be translated with the word ‘faith’ because it’s the same Greek word. In other words, to show ‘full trust’ is to show one’s trustworthiness, dependability, or reliability. The Christian’s life needs to be characterised by trustworthiness and dependability to God, His Word, and His people.

4. The word faith is used in reference to a scheme of ‘belief’. We looked at Romans 10:17 earlier where Paul said, “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ.” It’s through listening to, studying and reading God’s Word that our faith grows.

Luke says in Acts 6:7 “And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith”. Notice those two words, ‘the faith’. In other words, they were obedient to a scheme of belief or system of faith.

Nearing the end of his life, Paul wrote in 2 Timothy 4:7 “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith”. Paul kept a system of belief, the Word of God. Jude wrote in Jude 3 that we ‘contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God’s holy people.’ Notice that Jude said, the faith that was ‘once for all entrusted’ or ‘delivered’ as some translations have it.

The Bible is the complete revelation of God, and we don’t need any further revelations from God, why? 2 Peter 1:3 “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness”.

You see loved ones, faith isn’t some subjective leap in the dark, it’s concrete and objective, it has its foundation in the Word of God. Dead faith demands nothing but knowledge but saving faith demands knowledge and obedience.

Now let me ask you, what kind of faith do you possess? Is it the kind of faith that reads the Bible but doesn’t act upon what your reading and learning? Is it the kind of faith that comes to worship every week and says, ‘amen’ but doesn’t act on the message you’ve heard?

When I was a young Christian, I was in a Bible study being taught about faith and I said, ‘all things are possible with God’. ‘If I were in the desert dying of thirst, God would provide the water I needed to live’. And then a dear old brother named Bert whispered in my ear, ‘Mike, it’s great that you believe that God will provide the water, but you still need to use that faith to go and find it.’

Let me ask you, do you believe we can fill this building with precious souls? I mean, do you seriously have the faith in God, that He can fill this meeting room to capacity with souls? Now a dead faith will simply say, ‘yes, I believe that God can fill this room, there’s nothing impossible for God!’ But a living, saving faith goes way beyond that simple knowledge, kind of faith. A living, saving faith will be accompanied by obedience.

Our whole theme for the year has been centred around **Matthew 28:19+20** where Jesus says, “**Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.**”

Did we just choose this theme because it sounded good? You see loved ones, if we believe that God can fill this place with souls, we need to go and find those souls. There’s absolutely no point in preaching and teaching outreach and evangelism ideas, if we just simply sit here and say ‘amen.’ There’s absolutely no point in having a theme and a focus for the congregation if we don’t do nothing about it.

It was a stormy night in Birmingham, England, and **Hudson Taylor** was to speak at a meeting at the Severn Street schoolroom. His hostess assured him that nobody would attend on such a stormy night, but **Taylor** insisted on going. He said, ‘**I must go, even if there is no one but the doorkeeper**’. Less than a dozen people showed up, but the meeting was marked with unusual spiritual power as half of those present either became missionaries or gave their children as missionaries and the rest were faithful supporters of the **China Inland Mission** for years to come. That’s living, saving faith, the faith that trusts God and goes despite what others tell us.

Remember in the **Book of Joshua** when God told the Israelites to cross the Jordan river. Remember how God promised that He would stop the river from flowing, in order for them to cross on dry ground. Let me ask you, **did the Israelites need to have faith in God to stop the river flowing?** Yes. **But how did they demonstrate that faith in God?**

Joshua 3:13 “**And as soon as the priests who carry the ark of the LORD—the Lord of all the earth—set foot in the Jordan, its waters flowing downstream will be cut off and stand up in a heap.**” I can imagine them nervously walking towards that river and saying, ‘**OK God, stop the river now**’, but nothing happens. I can imagine them standing at the river’s edge, panicking and saying, ‘**Ok God we’re here now, stop the river**’, but nothing happens.

Notice what the text says in **Joshua 3:15+16**, ‘**as soon as the priests put their feet in the Jordan, the waters stopped flowing**’. They already had the faith to believe that God could stop the river, but they needed to demonstrate that faith in God by taking those first steps.

You see, that’s where we get it mixed up, we want God to fill this place with souls and then we say, ‘**ok, when He’s done that, we’ll reach out to the lost**’. But God says, ‘**No! It doesn’t work like that, I’ll fill this place when you do your part in going out and speaking to those lost souls first**’.

Loved ones, when we stepped out in faith in the waters of baptism, faith doesn’t end there. We’re supposed to use our faith to reach the lost but we can’t do that by sitting in the pews. Our faith needs to grow and develop, we’re to continually step out in faith.

Let’s do more than just maintain this marvellous attribute of the fruit of the Spirit. Let’s grow in faith, so that we won’t have ‘**little faith**’ as Jesus says in **Matthew 6:30**. Let’s strive to have ‘**great faith**’ as Jesus told the centurion in **Matthew 8:10** and the woman of Canaan in **Matthew 15:28**. And if your struggling with your faith this morning, then ask, what the disciples asked Jesus to do for them in **Luke 17:5** “**Increase our faith!**”

The fruit of the Spirit is made up of qualities to which all Christians should aspire. They are qualities that need no law, they need no regulation, and they need no restraint. They are godly qualities which come from the foundational principle of love for God and for His creation. If these qualities are applied properly to our lives, they will build a good relationship with God, with our family, and with our friends. Every godly person of the past was characterised by them, and every godly person of future will be characterised by them.

Let us, therefore, strive in earnestness to allow the Holy Spirit to yield His fruit of ‘**love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control,**’ in our lives. If you’re not a Christian, or you now understand that you have a dead faith, then please don’t leave here today without asking someone about how they can help you find a living, saving faith.