

The Difference Faith and Deeds Make

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What Difference Does God Make?

James 2:14-26

Who can tell me what two presidential candidates were running for office in 1960? And who can tell me why this presidential election was different than any prior election?

The 1960 Presidential Debates between Vice President Nixon and Senator Kennedy were the first nationally televised debates in presidential campaign history. And because of television, for the first time 70 million voters were given the opportunity to not only hear the candidates, but to visually compare them as well.

Surprisingly, opinion polls revealed a sharp contrast between the voters who had actually watched the debates on TV versus those who had merely listened to them on the radio. While radio listeners clearly thought that Nixon had won the first debate, television viewers were captivated by Kennedy's smile, charm and overall appearance.

Television underscored the significance of nonverbal communication. As we've studied more and more how people communicate with each other, we see that communication is lot more than just talk. We've discovered that we "talk" with our body that we "listen" with our eyes. We are not always conscious of this fact, but we are doing this all the time.

I'm sure you've all watched the shows on TV where the lead detective is able to catch the murderer because this suspect, who just happens to be the girl's boyfriend, whenever he was asked a question, he would always look up to the right for a brief fraction of a second, and of course, we all know, because we are very smart, that whenever someone does this, that means he is trying to cover up the fact that he hid the murder weapon in an unmarked brown box in his mother's basement and he was made fun of as a child because he had a stuttering problem. Of course, we all know this!

Just like some of us are better than others in listening with our ears, some of us are also better at listening with our eyes. So, tonight, to test your skills, I am going to give you a quick test called, "Are you smarter than a TV detective?"

1. What emotion is associated with the "palm to chest" gesture?

- A. Superiority
- B. Critical judgment
- C. Sincerity
- D. Confidence

Answer: (C)

2. What is the meaning of the “thumb under the chin” gesture?

- A. Deceit
- B. Boredom
- C. Anxiety
- D. Critical judgment

Answer: (D)

3. What does it mean when a person rubs his or her nose?

- A. Superiority
- B. Anticipation
- C. Dislike
- D. Anger

Answer: (C)

4. What message is conveyed when a person touches his or her eyeglasses to their lips?

- A. Interest
- B. Stalling
- C. Disbelief
- D. Impatience

Answer: (B)

5. When a person looks over the top of his or her eyeglasses, what message are they sending?

- A. Contempt
- B. Distrust
- C. Scrutiny
- D. Suspicion

Answer: (C)

6. What is the impact of nonverbal communication in a face-to-face conversation?

- A. 20%
- B. 40%
- C. 70%
- D. 85%

Answer: (C)

7. Which of the following gestures is associated with lying?

- A. Talking through fingers

- B. Eye rub
- C. Ear rub
- D. Lack of direct eye contact
- E. All of the above

Answer: (E)

If you answered all those questions correctly, there is a wonderful career waiting for you in law enforcement. And who knows? One day, you may get your own TV show.

Mark Twain, the great American author said this:

Actions speak louder than words, but not nearly as often.

Isn't that the truth? While most of the world is listening with their eyes, too often, we have done nothing but talk. And we just can not understand why they are not interested in what we have to say. Well, actions do speak louder than words, but as Mark Twain poignantly points out, this does not happen nearly as often, especially in the church, especially among those who would call ourselves Christians.

We have been doing a series on the book of James entitled, "What Difference Does God Make?" And I've entitled tonight's sermon, "The Difference Faith and Deeds Make." Please bow your heads with me as we pray. Let's pray.

Right off the bat, I need to make a few clarifying remarks regarding the passage that we are going to be reading. You should know that there has been quite a bit of controversy regarding the book of James, and in particular, this specific passage that we are going to be studying tonight. In fact, there was great opposition to the book of James being introduced into the canon of Scripture, meaning, that there were people who thought that this book should not be included in the Bible, particularly this section that we are going to be studying tonight. Pretty cool, huh?

We believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God, and as Paul boldly declares, "All Scripture is God-breathed." And it is God, not man, who decided that this passage should be in the Bible. So, we must read it, study it, understand it, and apply it in our lives, even if it makes us uncomfortable.

The heart of the so-called controversy in James is that he seems to be directly contradicting what the apostle Paul emphatically declares in his writings, namely that we are justified by faith alone, that faith is in and of itself, wholly sufficient to bring us into a right relationship with God. This is what Paul writes in Ephesians 2:8-9:

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.

And as we will read here in just a minute, it appears that James is saying that in fact, Paul is wrong, that faith alone is not enough, but faith *and* deeds. Faith *and* works. And while this may on the surface appear to be contradictory statements, if we do even just a little bit of background work, we will see that there is no contradiction here. Paul and James were writing to two very different groups, and they were both trying to correct errors. Paul was writing to a group of people who thought that the observance of the law was what was required for salvation, in other words, Paul was writing to correct Legalism. Paul writes to tell them, “You don’t understand, faith is what matters to God. Not deeds. There is absolutely nothing you can do to earn God’s grace and mercy. Salvation is a gift. It is an unearned gift.” But unlike Paul’s audience, the group that James is writing to is on the opposite end of the spectrum, people who gave lip service to God, people who said that they believed in God, but their lifestyle was anything but honoring to God. Paul is saying that you can’t earn faith by deeds. And James agrees. What James is saying is that if your faith truly is a saving faith, it should naturally *lead* to deeds. In other words, true faith will produce good deeds. Period.

With that said, let’s dive into the book of James. We are reading from chapter 2, verses 14 through 26. Some of you hardcore nerds here tonight may have noticed that we are skipping verses 1-13, but Jonathan recently taught on that passage at the main service, so if you are interested you can go to our website to hear that sermon. But tonight, we are studying James 2:14-26. Let’s read.

James 2:14-26

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if people claim to have faith but have no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 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? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 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 what I do. 19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder. 20 You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless? 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. 23 And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. 24 You see that people are justified by what they do and not by faith alone. 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.

The question that James is raising here is this: Is there any relationship between faith and deeds? And if there is a relationship, what kind of a relationship is it? Simple enough, right?

What is Faith?

So before we look at how faith and deeds are related, let's first study them individually. First, what is faith?

Faith can simply be defined as trust in God. Faith is choosing to believe that there is a God. Faith is a belief. It is something that we primarily associate with the heart. And it relates to our vertical relationship with God. And so when we talk about faith, we usually associate with it things like worship, or prayer and fasting, reading the Bible, having a Quiet Time with God. Things that help us connect with God. Faith is vertically oriented. Well, what about deeds? What are deeds?

What are Deeds?

Deeds are not beliefs but they are actions, things that we do. It usually involves the use of our hands and it relates to our horizontal relationship with mankind, our neighbors. So when we talk about deeds, we usually associate with it things like feeding the poor, volunteering with the children's ministry, or serving as a greeter at Joshua House. Deeds are horizontally oriented.

Is There Any Relationship Between Faith and Deeds?

Faith is vertically oriented, and deeds are horizontally oriented. So, let's go back to the question that James is raising here: Is there any relationship between faith and deeds? If so, what is that relationship? Is there any connection between our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationship with our neighbors? James answers this by raising two rhetorical questions in verse 14:

James 2:14

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

We should all read this and be like, "Duh, James, tell me something that I don't know! I learned this in kindergarten! Come on, tell me something new!"

And James hears this attitude in us, and he gets this look on his face, and he says, "Oh, really? Tell you something you don't know, huh? Let me dig in just a little bit here. Let me give you an example." And he continues on this way in verses 15 and 16:

James 2:15-16

Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 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?

Okay, maybe this was just a hypothetical situation, but it sure doesn't feel that way, does it? It just got really personal. I read this and there is something disturbingly convicting about it. Something in me resonates with this idea because I see this everywhere around me. In fact, I can not escape this hypothetical situation.

James 2:15

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

“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.” Suppose? Well, actually let’s suppose that there are 25,000 children who die each and every day due to poverty. Let’s suppose that 660 million people live without basic sanitation. Let’s suppose that 385 million people in the world live on less than \$1 a day. Let’s suppose that 400 million children have no access to safe drinking water. Let’s suppose that 790 million people in the developing world are still chronically undernourished, almost two-thirds of whom reside in Asia and the Pacific. Let’s suppose. But remember, this is just a hypothetical situation.

James 2:16

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?

What good is it? What good is it? Everything inside of me screams out, “Absolutely no good whatsoever!” This question should make us angry, it should get us furious, and make us ask, “Who would do such a thing? Who?” Well, us! You and me! Us!

Too often, we who would call ourselves Christians get so focused on being right with God that we’ve failed to see the casualties all around us, the bodies of our brothers and sisters lying on the streets with no food and no clothes. In our desire to be so close and intimate with God, we have removed ourselves from this world and have become spiritual monks hiding out in the four walls of this church building. Our hands meet together in earnest prayer before God but they never reach into our pockets to give to those in need. Our hands reach up in adoration to worship God, but they never reach out to wipe the tears of those in pain. These hands, while they are holy hands were never meant to be immaculate. Our holy hands are meant to be calloused hands.

Dr. Ralph D. Winter, the founder of the US Center for World Mission, had this to say:

What is the use of evangelism if it produces Christians who don’t act, who don’t do, who don’t follow God’s will? All they do is sing in church.

This is exactly what infuriated Jesus more than anything. You see, this is exactly what the Pharisees were so good at. What good is our worship, what good is our prayer, what good is evangelism, what good is our weekly gathering, what good is Joshua House, what good is our faith if we fail to love our neighbors? James says that such faith is dead!

James 2:17

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

Faith without deeds is not a mediocre faith. It’s not somewhat okay faith. It’s not even decent faith. Faith without deeds is dead!

Well, what about deeds without faith? Well, just as faith without deeds is dead, deeds without faith is barren.

In other words, in order for our deeds to bear lasting fruit, it must be accompanied by faith. The things that we do for others with our hands, if our hearts are not in it, we are merely faking it. And we all know what that feels like, don't we? Many of you are experiencing that right now. Maybe you came to church tonight with the person who is sitting next to you, and you know, you know, that your relationship is not where it could be. You know that there is so much more to be had, but because you are simply going through the motions of being friends, there is no fruit in your relationship. Your hands reach out in care and concern, but your heart is far away. Actions without the heart is meaningless. Deeds without faith is barren.

You can even say that deeds without faith is religion. It is religion. But Jesus is not calling us into a religion, he is calling us into a relationship. It is not faith or deeds. It is faith *AND* deeds. Faith *and* Deeds! God's command to us is Both-And.

God's Command to Us is Both-And

Both faith *AND* deeds - Both what we believe and what we do; both our heart and our hands; both the vertical relationship with God and the horizontal relationship with our neighbors. Both-and. Both-and.

But truth be told, this is much easier said than done, because for most of us, we have a natural inclination to either faith or deeds. For some of us, a relationship with God comes so easily and naturally. Your temperament, your passion, your heart's desire is to seek intimacy with God. So you naturally gravitate towards a life of faith. And the reason that you come back to Joshua House again and again, week after week, is for that very purpose. But maybe you are not connected to a small group, and even if you are, it feels difficult to relate to others. It takes a lot of work to get motivated to care for someone else when they are interfering with your relationship with God.

And for others of us, we thrive in situations where we get to get our hands dirty, being around people, serving the poor and helping the needy. You find deep pleasure and fulfillment in the sacrifices that you make for the sake of your neighbor. But you find it absolutely impossible to sit still. The quietness of the early morning or late evening makes you feel uncomfortable. And maybe the thought of being alone with God feels intimidating and maybe even a little bit weird. So, often, you put God on the backburner, because what can God do that I can't?

And the challenge for us tonight is to find that middle because God's command to us is both-and, not either-or. The challenge is to become an authentic follower of Jesus who will love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, *AND* to love our neighbor as ourselves. This is exactly what Jesus is talking about in Matthew 22:

Matthew 22:35-40

One of them, an expert in the law, tested him [Jesus] with this question: 36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

In other words, our vertical relationship with God can not be separated from our horizontal relationship with our neighbor. In fact, it is impossible to do one without doing the other. So, we must grow. We must grow. If you are vertically oriented, you must learn how to grow in your deeds. If you are horizontally oriented, you must learn how to grow in your faith. We must grow!

How Do We Grow in Faith?

So how we grow in faith? We grow in faith by extravagant obedience to God.

There is this couple, this husband and wife. They were good people. Both of them, they were really good people. They loved each other intensely and they loved God with all their heart. But the one thing they most wanted in life was the one thing that they could not have. They could not get pregnant. They tried again and again, month after month, year after year, against all hope they hoped for a child. And when those hopes were crushed, they mustered up everything inside of them, and hoped some more. They had wonderful friends who prayed with them and for them, and they cheered this couple on. But you know, there’s really only so much disappointment that the human heart can handle, and after not just years, but decades of crushed hopes, this couple stopped hoping. And their friends stopped praying. It wasn’t easy, but life went on for them, but with quiet desperation in their hearts. The one thing they wished for was the one thing they could not have. A child to hold, a child to love, a child who will live the life that they could only dream of.

This is the story of thousands of couples. Couples who are hoping against all hope. Couples who are desperately trying to get pregnant. I imagine that there are some of you here tonight who are living out this story. But the story that I am sharing tonight is unique in that it is a story that affects every single one of us. You see, it is the story of Abraham and Sarah, whose lineage would include the son of God, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

And James uses the story of Abraham and Sarah, and their promised son, Isaac, to demonstrate what extravagant obedience to God actually looks like.

It wasn’t until Abraham was a hundred years old and Sarah was ninety, that they finally had Isaac. They hoped against all hope and finally had Isaac when Abraham was a hundred years old and Sarah was ninety. And as incredible as that is in and of itself, what’s even more spectacular about this story is what happens years later. God visits Abraham and tells him that he must sacrifice his son, this child of promise. Can you imagine what that would feel like? It’s one thing to not have a son at all, but to actually

have a son finally born to them, it seems absolutely cruel of God to ask for something so grotesque and mean. Why in the world would God bless Abraham and Sarah with a child in their old age, only to ask them to sacrifice him? Is that really God? Can this really be God?

Have you ever asked that question, "Can this really be God?" Have you ever experienced something in your life that makes you ask, "Can this really be God?" Maybe you are here today investigating God, but you find it extremely difficult to believe because of the things that you've experienced in your life and you have asked yourself again and again, "Can this really be God?" Or maybe you have been a Christian for a long time and you find yourself in a season in life that just does not make sense and it makes you wonder, "Can this really be God?" Are you struggling in school? Have you been fired from a job? Are you having a hard time making your rent payment? Is your marriage on the rocks? Are you experiencing pain in your family? Are you battling cancer? "Can this really be God?"

What does it say about God that you can't find a job? What does it say about God that your marriage is struggling? What does it say about God that you are battling a life-threatening disease? Well, here is what Abraham and Sarah discover.

I don't know exactly how he gets himself to do it, but Abraham decides that he will obey God. And we get a glimpse into the mind of Abraham in Hebrews 11:19, and here is what Abraham is thinking: "He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead." Abraham is saying, "I will obey God even if it means the death of my beloved son, because this same God is the God who can raise men from the dead. Surely, God will raise my son, Isaac!" So in faith, in absolute complete faith, with trembling hands and a heart full of love, Abraham raises the knife to kill his son because he was going to obey God no matter what the cost, because this God can even raise the dead.

Did you know that God can raise the dead? Did you know that God can breathe life into death? Did you know that? Do you know that tonight?

Of course, God intervenes before Abraham brings the knife down, and Isaac is spared. So what was this all about? We are told that God was testing Abraham's faith. But the weird thing is that God did not need this process of validation. God knew Abraham. God knew his faith. God knew what Abraham would do from the very start. So, in some sense, what transpired on that mountain has a lot more to do with you and me tonight, than it does with God testing Abraham. God already knew. But God wants us here tonight to see this interaction as a demonstration of extravagant obedience looks like. You want to grow in faith? Practice extravagant obedience!

You and I can talk about faith all we want, but unless it produces deeds in our lives, it is dead. You and I can talk about faith all we want, but unless it produces complete obedience in our lives, it is dead. You and I can talk about faith all we want, but unless it produces in us an attitude of radical surrender to God, it is dead. You and I can talk about faith all we want, but unless by faith we are able to give up the most important

thing in our lives and believe at the same time that God can even raise the dead, our faith is dead.

James 2:22

You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did.

Abraham's faith was not a faith of words, but it was a faith of deeds, it was a faith of action. It was a faith of complete trust and extravagant obedience to God, even when he did not understand what God was doing.

How Do We Grow in Deeds?

So we grow in our faith through extravagant obedience to God. And the way we grow in Deeds is by costly self-sacrifice for our neighbors.

Just in case the story of Abraham didn't close the deal for you, James tells one more story. This time, it is not some well-to-do, man of great influence and stature. This time, he tells the story of the least of the least, a prostitute named Rahab. It is a story found in the book of Joshua.

After the death of Moses, it was now the responsibility of Joshua to lead the people of God across the Jordan into the Promised Land. And in preparation, Joshua sends two spies to survey the land and they choose as their hiding place, the home of Rahab. Somehow the King of Jerico learns about these two men, and he sends his troops to Rahab's home to get these men. And if they were caught, it would have certainly led to death. But Rahab, risking her life, puts herself between the soldiers and these spies, and by her wise actions, save the lives of these two men. And this act, this act of love and faith, is recorded in the famous hall of faith in Hebrews:

Hebrews 11:31

By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

Here in Hebrews, Rahab's name is mentioned among some of the most notable and significant people in the Bible. What she did was that impressive to God. As Rahab risked everything she had to serve her neighbors, the way that you and I grow in deeds is by costly self-sacrifice for our neighbors.

The famous pastor and author Tony Campolo share an incredible story: One year Tony was invited to speak in Honolulu, and he was having trouble sleeping because of the jetlag and the time change. So, at 3 in the morning, he decided to go to an all-night diner. And as he was sitting on the counter, he noticed a group of women walk into the diner. After a few minutes Tony realized that these women were hookers, on their way home after working the evening. Tony was unintentionally listening in to their conversation and overheard one of the girls, Agnes, tell her friend that the next day

would be her 39th birthday. Agnes and the group of women left after a short while, and that's when Tony had this incredible idea.

He spoke to the owner of the diner behind the counter: "Hey, did you hear that one woman say that tomorrow was her birthday? Whaddya say we throw her a birthday party? I'll come back tomorrow night with some decorations, and let's surprise her with a cake!" The owner's wife heard Tony's suggestion and said, "That is a wonderful idea! Let's do it!"

Twenty-four hours later the diner was decorated with streamers and balloons, and it was filled with a large assortment of night people who had heard about what was happening. When the prostitutes came in for their usual coffee, everyone shouted: "Happy birthday, Agnes!" Agnes stood speechless as the singing began. Tears started to roll down her cheeks. Nobody had showed her genuine kindness in years. The owner brought out a birthday cake with candles. Agnes was in such shock that she had to be reminded to blow them out. "Well, cut the cake, Agnes!" the man said. She finally said in a quiet whisper, "Please, I just, I just want to keep the cake. I'll take it to my apartment down the street, just for a couple of days. Please let me keep the cake!" No one knew how to respond, but no one could think of a reason to tell her no. So Agnes ran out of the diner, holding a birthday cake, with tears running down her face.

Everyone in the diner was completely silent, all taking in the beauty of what had just transpired. Tony finally broke the silence: "I have another idea. Why don't we pray for Agnes?" Without hesitation he began to pray that God would bless her on her birthday, that God would bring peace into her life and save her from all that troubled her. And at the Amen, the diner owner said, "Hey, you didn't tell me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you preach at?" Tony thought for a moment, and then he answered with a grin, "I preach at the kind of church that throws birthday parties for whores at 3:30 in the morning!" What happened next was the most poignant moment of all. The man looked at Tony in disbelief and he said, "No! No, you don't! There is no church like that! I would join a church like that!"

Lord, make Joshua House a church like that! May our extravagant obedience to you and costly self-sacrifice for our neighbors allow us to change the world, one person at a time, people like Agnes.

In talking about faith and deeds, I think sometimes it can easily lead us into despair. We'll either try for a while and find it absolutely impossible to live out, or we simply don't even try because it seems so completely out of reach, so completely out of our league. But we must remember this: The goal of Christian living is to become more and more like Jesus.

Be Perfect!

I don't know if you know this or not, Jesus is *perfect*. Jesus is *perfect*. And this perfect Jesus, in his great Sermon on the Mount, gives this outlandish command to his followers:

Matthew 5:48

Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

“Be perfect!” To become more and more like Jesus means to become more and more perfect, as he is perfect.

“Be perfect!” We read that and most of the time we just glance over it without much thought simply because it sounds so ridiculous and out of reach. But once in a while, we read that and we pause for a moment, and we ask ourselves, “Did he really say what I think he just said? Did he really mean that? You don’t understand, I don’t even know how to even begin to talk about becoming more and more like Jesus when I’m still just trying to figure out this whole faith and deeds deal! You have no idea how hard I’ve been trying, but I fail miserably again and again and again and again!” And I think the apostle Paul can sympathize with us in this regard.

Romans 7:15

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

He goes on to say this a few verses later:

Romans 7:21-24

So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. 22 For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; 23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. 24 What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

And here is his glorious epiphany!

Romans 7:21-25

Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

The only hope for you and me is Jesus Christ! Jesus raises the standards to a whole new level, to perfection, making it impossible for us to reach on our own, but our hope lies in the fact that it is this same Jesus who has made a way for us to meet that standard. C.S. Lewis, in his wonderful book *Mere Christianity* writes this:

The command “Be perfect” is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command.

In other words, when Jesus says, “Be perfect!” he absolutely means it. *But* he is not expecting us to do this on our own. *He* is the one who will do this in us!

The revolution of Jesus is not merely about changing how we act and talk. He is not merely interested in fixing our outer appearance. He is not merely interested in making us into nice people. But this revolution is about the transformation of the entire person from the inside out. There is absolutely nothing in us that is not affected by this revolution. Jesus realizes that our actions and our words do not emerge from nothing, but they reveal something about who we are in our deepest part. And it is exactly *that* part that Jesus wants to transform. And that's why he says in Luke 6 these words:

Luke 6:43-45

No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. 44 Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. 45 Good people bring good things out of the good stored up in their heart, and evil people bring evil things out of the evil stored up in their heart. For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks.

A true disciple of Jesus is not someone who merely says all the right things and does all the right things. Nor is the true disciple of Jesus someone who believes in all the right things. But the true disciple of Jesus is someone who truly desires good things, whose fruits, whose deeds are good because his heart is good. He is someone who has deep integrity, a word that means complete, unbroken, and whole, someone who's inside and outside look identical. And if you have ever tried to become a person of integrity on your own, you know that it is an impossible task. Our hearts are despicably wicked. And it is here, where we are completely at a loss as to how to become a truly good person and live a truly good life that Jesus steps in and says, "Be perfect! And let me transform you into the person who can actually obey that command!" What's required is a total transformation of the self from the inside out.

And so how does this transformation actually begin? It all begins in a relationship with Jesus. This is what redemption is all about. This is what salvation is all about. It all begins in a relationship with Jesus.

Let me close tonight by sharing a little more of what C.S. Lewis continues to say in *Mere Christianity*.

"Make no mistake," He [Jesus] says, "if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in my hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that. You have free will, and if you choose, you can push me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand that I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life, whatever inconceivable purification it may cost you after death, whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect – until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said he was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less."

Let's pray.

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James 2:14-26

Faith and Deeds

Faith is Vertically Oriented

Deeds are Horizontally Oriented

God's Command to Us is Both-And

Faith without Deeds is Dead

Deeds without Faith is Barren

We Grow in Faith by Extravagant Obedience to God

We Grow in Deeds by Costly Self-Sacrifice for Our Neighbors

The Ultimate Goal of Christian Living is to Become More and More Like Jesus