

# THE FAITH FILES

## The Letter from James

October 20, 2001

### 1. James 1:2-3

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your **faith** develops perseverance. (NIV)

- If this writer is James, the brother of Jesus, then this letter reveals so much of who Jesus was in his family life. James, having grown up with Jesus, would naturally reflect the issues that were most important in Jesus' life on earth. James would have observed these things firsthand.
- The first thing of significance that James wrote was to consider trials a joy. That would be consistent with Jesus' life. James would have been among Jesus' brothers who mocked him and did not believe in Him (see John 7:3-5). That must have been painful for Jesus, but He not only endured the trials but must have rejoiced in them.
- Jesus never asks us to do anything He hasn't already done.
- We are to consider trials not just as joy, but as "pure" joy. They are nothing else but a joyful opportunity to put our faith in God. Do you have pure joy when it comes to your trials?
- It says that trials test our faith. That doesn't mean they reveal a lack of faith, but the true nature of the faith we have. Trials prove that what God has done in you is real. Think of it. If you had gone through some of the trials you are going through now several years ago, you could not have done it. The trials are testing—proving the reality of—your faith. They are proving the reality of what God has "built" in you.
- I am having to trust the Lord for my reputation at this particular time. It is not easy to consider that "pure joy."
- This testing produces perseverance, waiting on God for the deliverance. This is faith that you don't take matters into your own hands and try to resolve them, but you wait on God for His resolution or vindication.
- Make a list of all the trials in your life, but whatever definition you choose to categorize them as a trial. The bigger the list, the more rejoicing you should be doing! How can you exercise faith in the midst of those trials?

## 2. James 2:5

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in **faith** and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (NIV)

- Follow this line of reasoning with me: if we have faith and faith is what God uses to prosper us, then how could the poor in this verse be rich in faith and poor in the eyes of the world? Would not their faith have enabled them to obtain the things of life that many teach God wants us to have? It makes some of the faith/prosperity teachings seem a little off in their reasoning of what we are to use our faith to obtain. It seems you can be poor and have faith, and your poverty is not an indication of lack of faith.
- It was God's idea to make the world's poor rich in faith. In many ways, the poor do have more faith than the rich. They have learned to trust God on a daily basis, have less stuff to interfere with the exercise of their faith, rejoice at God's provision, and are generally more generous than the rich (the rich may give more in absolute terms but the poor give more as a percentage of what they have; remember the widow who gave two mites in Luke 21).

## 3. James 2:14-17

What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have **faith** but has no deeds? Can such **faith** save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, **faith** by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (NIV)

- How many times has the concept of faith and works been mentioned in The Faith Files? Too many to count. But here it is again! Faith without deeds is dead and useless.
- Claiming to have faith isn't enough. Show it by your actions.
- The analogy of an encounter with a poor brother and sister is not included here to encourage the reader to have mercy on the poor. It is an example of what faith without works looks like. If you meet a poor person and say you feel bad for them, but do nothing to help alleviate their suffering, then your feeling bad would be meaningless. It is the same for anyone who says they have faith, but doesn't do anything from that faith.
- Let's do it one more time. Take a sheet of paper and on one side of the page, list all the things for which you are trusting the Lord. On the other side, list all the things you can possibly **do** in faith. For instance, if you are believing the Lord for a new home, then on the action side you can list such things as: look for a new home today,

try to sell your current home, save some money (no matter how little the amount), tell people that the Lord is going to give you a new house, look in the newspaper at the home sale ads, call a realtor, and drive around and look from your car. Can you think of any others? Better yet, don't work on this example, work on a real one from your own life.

#### 4. 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 what I do. (NIV)

- Someone may be tempted to think that he or she is a specialist by having faith and someone else specializes in the deeds of faith. James rejects this thinking. How can anyone not doing something with their faith possibly show that they have faith? The truth is that they can't.
- Don't be proud of your doctrinal beliefs, unless those doctrinal beliefs cause you to act with resurrection power in your daily life. Don't be haughty because you believe that the Holy Spirit is poured on all flesh in this day and hour. Do something with that Holy Spirit you claim to have! That is faith.

#### 5. James 2:19

You **believe** that there is one God. Good! Even the demons **believe** that-- and shudder. (NIV)

- If faith without works were enough, the demon world would be righteous. They beheld the majesty of God but it didn't change their behavior! Some Christians take pride in their doctrinal faith, but the demons have an accurate theology as well. In fact, the demons shudder when they behold the unity of God.
- The issue isn't what you believe but what you are **doing** with what you believe. So, what are you doing with what you believe?
- One action that isn't appropriate with faith is to judge another believer for not believing what you do. Perhaps God has shown you something He hasn't shown them yet. Along with faith, love is mentioned again and again in this study. Do you love other believers who don't "believe" what you do? If not, repent.

#### 6. James 2:20-23

You foolish man, do you want evidence that **faith** without deeds is useless? Was not our ancestor Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see that his **faith** and his actions were working together, and his **faith** was made complete by what he did. 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. (NIV)

- I want to be God's friend, although God chooses His friends just like we do. I don't think I can even qualify unless I have faith and carry it out in every day living.
- Last night I made a decision at 1 am. I decided to give my business to the Lord, totally and completely. Having done all at this point that I know to do, my faith requires action and there was still one more thing to do: Give it to the Lord. I have peace!
- Time for another list, whether real or mental. Make a list of all the things that you are giving to the Lord in faith: children, future, career, ministry, projects, church, and investments just to name a few. Now put the list in a prominent place like your Bible, bedroom dresser, or automobile. That is your faith action for the day.
- The church staff I worked with took time to verbally give each one of the areas we were responsible for to the Lord. The Lord immediately gave us a strategy we had been asking Him for, **and** someone visited church the next Sunday and gave a \$50,000 gift! You never know what God will do when you turn something over to Him completely and fully.
- When you believe God and do something with it, God credits your account with righteousness. Is your account running low on righteousness? Then do something with your faith.

#### 7. James 2:24-26

You see that a person is justified by what he does and not by **faith** alone. 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? As the body without the spirit is dead, so **faith** without deeds is dead. (NIV)

- Rahab's story has always intrigued me. Here is a woman engaged in temple prostitution, yet she had faith. And that faith was credited to her as righteousness, even though she was still involved in her profession! That's the power that faith has to bring the user into right relationship with God.
- Rahab is listed in Jesus' family tree (see Matthew 1:5). Jesus had a former prostitute in His lineage. But Rahab had faith and God saved her.
- Rahab's faith saved her and her household, for when Jericho was destroyed, the spies spared her house from destruction. She certainly did something with her faith.
- How did Rahab know who the spies were? She knew because God told her and God told her because she had faith!

- If God revealed Himself to Rahab, how much more can He reveal Himself to you? What is God “saying” to you through your faith? Why are afraid to believe that it’s God? Do you realize that if you have faith at that point, it will be credited to you as righteousness?
- I challenge you to spend 10 minutes of quiet today, away from everything. Write down (faith requires action) everything you sense or think about. God speaks through faith.

### 8. James 5:14-15

Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in **faith** will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. (NIV)

- Whose faith will make the person well? The faith of the elders or the faith of the person who called the elders?
- This seems to tell us that healing wasn’t restricted to Jesus’ public ministry. Healing was to be a part of church life.
- What can a sick person do in faith? They can call the elders. Faith without action is as useless as a body without a spirit.

### 9. James 1:6

But when he asks, he must **believe** and not **doubt**, because he who **doubts** is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. (NIV)

- This pertains to the believer asking for wisdom. When you ask God to speak to your situation, and something happens, you must assume that God has answered your prayer whether you understand it or not. There can be no room for doubt.
- God is a great communicator. He speaks every language, can use circumstances, His Word, other people and even nature to answer your request for wisdom. Stop doubting and start believing.
- Could your source of doubt or confusion be that you didn’t like the answer you got from the Lord?
- We pray for answers and then are surprised when they come! Or we don’t get the answer we expected in a way that we expected, so we dismiss the answer as a trick of the devil.

- Doubting God's ability to give you answers makes you unstable, like a wave of the sea that can be tossed about in every direction.
- Guidance isn't a problem for those who have faith. For the only way an answer to a faith prayer can be received is through faith! There is no other way.
- The way to get an answer is to commit to do God's will before you know what it is. You surrender your right to veto what God wants.

#### **10. James 2:1-4**

My brothers, as **believers** in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? (NIV)

- There is one uniting force among all believers and that is their faith. This passage urges us not to make distinctions based on economic standing. This means that someone who has lack doesn't necessarily lack faith. In fact, a verse above (2:5) tells us that the poor are rich in faith.
- Notice that the rich aren't instructed to urge the poor to use their faith to get more money or possessions. The rich were simply to welcome the poor as brothers and sisters, making no distinctions.