

FATEFUL WORDS OF JESUS

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“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'” Matt. 7:21-23 WEB

These fateful words of Jesus set forth qualifications for entry into Christ's earthly kingdom. They express human frailty and failings in ways that strike deep into our human prejudices, fearfulness, arrogance, and pride. They express God's values rather than ours as they push us towards action rather than words. And they separate rather than unify, based upon clear recognition of and obedience to God's often-expressed desires for human behavior.

Matthew 5 through 7 set forth God's plan for his kingdom on earth, headed by his Son, Jesus Christ. They specifically speak of the importance of “doing”; God's will rather than merely speaking of it.

It's not human nature to directly act on God's will---we prefer to talk, ponder, plan, and pontificate. Talk about faith is cheap; action according to faith is often very costly.

The Book of James, chapter 2, details perhaps the best scriptural rendition of human faith in action as it reminds us of the Patriarch Abraham who as yet has no children of his own, but is promised by God that his seed would eventually be as numberless as the stars of heaven. Soon his wife Sara is blessed with a son, Isaac, who in their eyes would fulfill God's promise. Abraham's testing came when God sent him off into the wilderness to sacrifice with Isaac, even though he had no animal to offer. As they drew near the chosen site, as young Isaac

asks where they will gain a sacrificial animal, and Abraham responds, "My son, God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering." When no animal appears, Abraham has Isaac lay out the wood, binds Isaac upon the altar, and takes up his knife to complete the sacrifice. At that crucial moment Abraham spots a lamb caught in a thicket, and offers it rather than Isaac. Abraham obviously had great personal faith, yet he was called upon to show his faith by his action, which he did to our eternal benefit.

James 2 goes

on to ask, "What good is it, my brothers, if a man says he has faith, but has no works? Can faith save him? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead in itself. But do you want to know, vain man, that faith apart from works is dead? Wasn't Abraham our father justified by works?... Scripture was fulfilled which says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness'; and he was called the friend of God. You see then that by works, a man is justified, and not only by faith. For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, even so faith apart from works is dead."

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Protestant Reformation brought the issues of faith versus works to the forefront of Christian thought. After 500 years of struggle we today seem to have come to the simple truth that we are justified by faith, which then frees and directs us to act on this faith, not as a source of salvation, but in response to our gratitude for salvation.

In the

opening Scripture, we note Jesus knew that someday there would be people who would substitute "flashy" religious behavior as evidence of their faith and source of their salvation. Thus they would fall short of his expectations for Kingdom membership, and be unacquainted with him in a spiritual sense. Their error would be disclosed by the final phrase, "I never knew you, depart from me, you who work iniquity," or as another translation says, "practice lawlessness."

Modern

Christians exist in a world of often pointed disagreement and conflict. Too many of us claim justification by faith while conveniently ignoring God's clear commands that we practice not only righteousness, but justice---political, economic, social, military, medical, and all other types of human interaction. Passivity in the face of great evil is not a virtue!