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A Faith that Works The Epistle of James

***You see that a person is
justified by works and not by
faith alone. (2:24)***

“The Double-Mindedness of Unbelief”

April 26, 2015

Sermon Text: James 1:9ff

Scripture Reading: 2 Kings 17

Introduction-

As we return to our study of the Epistle of James, let's make a few more important observations about verses 6-8,

James 1:6-8 But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea

that is driven and tossed by the wind. (7) For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; (8) he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.

Double-mindedness. This is the opposite of *single-mindedness*, which is a requirement for following Christ:

Matthew 10:32-38 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, (33) but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven. (34) "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35) For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (36) And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (37) Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and

whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Genuine faith is *single-minded*. This means:

“having but one aim or purpose; dedicated; resolute; steadfast”

The double-minded man goes back and forth. He is here, then he is there. His opinions change from moment to moment. As James says, such a person is like a wave on the sea driven and tossed by the wind. In other words, *genuine, true faith that comes from the Lord is not in him*. Consider how we see him in action in our Lord’s parable of the soils:

Matthew 13:18-23 "Hear then the parable of the sower: (19) When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. (20) As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, (21) yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately

he falls away. (22) As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. (23) As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

Verses 20-21 in particular describes the double-minded person. He or she is a fair weather Christian. When skies are clear and sunny and seas are calm, he is a Christian. But as soon as the storms and dangers and trials come, he is a worldling again. I have dealt with people like this, and so have most of you. They “believe” and “obey” God’s Word as long as there is no cost. But let it demand something of them, and they are back to the world.

And we see more examples of this in Scripture:

1 Kings 18:21 And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "**How long will you go limping between two different opinions?** If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word.

2 Kings 17:32-33 They also feared the LORD and appointed from among themselves all sorts of people as priests of the high places, who sacrificed for them in the shrines of the high places. (33) **So they feared the LORD but also served their own gods**, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away.

James includes much of the Old Testament in this letter, and I suspect that he had Elijah in mind when he rebuked double-mindedness. (Elijah will be mentioned again by James in the closing words of this letter.)

Isaiah 29:13 And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men,

Isaiah's words go right to the heart of the double-minded man. He talks the talk. He praises the Lord – often profusely – with his mouth. Praise the Lord. God is good (when things are going his way). That kind of thing you see. I know a man who does this. I have seen him do it. He tells people about how God has blessed his life and business, and in the next moment

he is using the Lord's name in the most blasphemous manner and embracing rank immorality.

Double-mindedness spreads like a disease and becomes full-blown religion, taught and approved of – *"their fear of Me is a commandment taught by men."* What Isaiah means is that the double-minded man's "church" embraces a theology of double-mindedness that is invented and taught by man, not by the Lord. Think this through. This double-minded religion can be either libertine (I can serve the Lord and be a Christian and yet love the world) or legalist (professing salvation by faith alone in Christ alone yet teaching and practicing justification by works). Laodicea abounds today in every city, town, and community, all under the guise of "Christian."

Hosea 7:8-11 Ephraim mixes himself with the peoples; **Ephraim is a cake not turned.** (9) Strangers devour his strength, and he knows it not; gray hairs are sprinkled upon him, and he knows it not. (10) The pride of Israel testifies to his face; yet they do not return to the LORD their God, nor seek him, for all this. (11) **Ephraim is like a dove, silly**

and without sense, calling to Egypt, going to Assyria.

This is classic double-mindedness. Want to know how repulsive and wicked it is to the Lord? This business of professing faith in and love for God and yet the next second loving the world? Think of a pancake. Here you are, all set for a nice breakfast in a restaurant and you order pancakes and the trimmings. Here they come stacked hot and high, looking browned and good. You butter them, dump the syrup on, and take your first bite and.....yuck! More than yuck. You gag and retch. Why? Because these outwardly good-looking pancakes *have only been grilled on one side*. They were unturned. The downside is still just gooey batter!

That is the image Hosea is using here for the Jews who claim to be God's people, but in the very next moment they are running down to Egypt or up to Assyria for help against their enemies, putting the flip side of their fickle "faith" in those nations who, in the end, are their enemies. The double-minded man is silly and without sense.

Matthew 6:24 "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he

will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

The double-minded man thinks he can serve God and the world. That he can have it both ways. He can have the benefits of forgiveness of sins, salvation, and heaven while at the very same time serving another master – money, the world. In fact, the double-minded man, for all his words about how he trusts in the Lord, *despises the Lord*. And is it not true that men have created their traditions, calling them the Word of God, that are in fact the worldly teachings of men? Is it not true that you can easily find celebrity "Christian" teachers and leaders and churches that teach this very thing? Joel Osteen is clearly such a teacher, but you need not even leave your own town to find churches like this.

What is it that the Lord requires? What kind of faith is true faith? Well, it is an exclusive faith. A single-minded faith with a single purpose and Object – to worship the living God and Him alone:

Exodus 20:1-6 And God spoke all these words, saying, (2) "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (3) "You shall

have no other gods before me. (4) "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (5) You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, (6) but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

The Lord does not answer the prayer of the double-minded man, because such a man does not ask in genuine faith. Such a man is evil, perhaps even more evil than the openly-professed atheist or idolater. This double-mindedness is a sin that is especially repugnant to the Lord. You find it at Laodicea:

Revelation 3:14-16 "And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: 'The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation. (15) "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! (16) So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

And James will have harsh words of warning about the "adultery" of professing allegiance to Christ while at the same time loving the world. Notice this carefully:

Double-mindedness is a sin that is only committed by a person who professes to be a Christian. All through this letter, James recognizes this dichotomy of genuine believers mixed with false believers in the visible church. We must recognize it as well.

James uses another adjective to describe the double-minded: *unstable*. Think about that. Unstable. Lacking stability. Unpredictable. Like a rotten foundation, something that you cannot depend upon. Such a person might be with you one moment, and against you the next. Praising Christ in church, then loving the world first think he is out the door.

If you want to see a plethora of examples of these, check out Facebook. There are all kinds of people there quoting Bible verses, praising God for this and that, and the next minute they will evidence open and rank love for the world.

The Beauty of Single-minded Faith

Let's turn then from the dismal world of the double-minded man, and consider the beauty and simplicity of

single-minded faith. In our study of James, we will find ourselves coming often to Hebrews 11. I am going to read right through all 40 verses of it because I cannot describe single-minded faith better than this:

Hebrews 11:1-40 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. (2) For by it the people of old received their commendation.

(3) By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

(4) By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.

(5) By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.

(6) And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

(7) By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.

(8) By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.

(9) By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

(10) For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

(11) By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

(12) Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

(13) These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (14) For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. (15) If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. (16) But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

(17) By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, (18) of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." (19) He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

(20) By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau. (21) By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. (22) By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the

exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

(23) By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful, and they were not afraid of the king's edict. (24) By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, (25) choosing rather to be mistreated with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. (26) He considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. (27) By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king, for he endured as seeing him who is invisible. (28) By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood, so that the Destroyer of the firstborn might not touch them.

(29) By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned. (30) By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days. (31) By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had given a friendly welcome to the spies.

(32) And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-- (33) who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, (34) quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. (35) Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. (36) Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated-- (38) of whom the world was not worthy--wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

(39) And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, (40) since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

There it is! Single-minded faith. Genuine faith. Faith that is a gift from the Lord through Jesus Christ. A faith that stands firmly no matter what the world, the flesh, or the devil throws at it. It is by this faith that the Christian overcomes the world and finishes his course in this life in victory.

May the Lord enable each one of us to worship and serve Him alone.