Affirming Our Faith through the Apostles' Creed
Don't Just Say It ... Display It

Text: James 2:14-17 -- What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? 17 So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Introduction: This morning, I wanted to bring one final message to you in the series ***Affirming Our Faith through the Apostles' Creed***. Having a biblically-based belief system is very important to every Christian. That's why we spent as much time as we did going over this statement of faith from the early church fathers. Any believer not grounded in the truth is, in the words of the Apostle Paul in **Ephesians 4:14**, prone to "**be blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming**." Because we want to avoid being led astray, we study Christian doctrine and theology (**from theos meaning God and logos meaning word = words about God**).

Clearly what we believe is important, but we also recognize that a person can **think** the right things about God and man without it having any noticeable impact on his life. **The comedian Louis C. K. seems to be the poster child for this kind of mentality. He says, "*I have a lot of beliefs …. And I live by none of them. That's just the way I am. They're just* my *beliefs. I just like believing them—I like that part. They're my little "believies." They make* me *feel good about who I am. But if they get in the way of a thing I want, I … just do what I want to do***." Unfortunately, he is not alone in his thinking. Many professing Christians have a basic understanding of what the Bible teaches about following Christ as Savior and Lord, yet, **where the rubber meets the road**, their convictions do little to affect their choices. That's where this passage from the book of James comes into view.

Context: Early on in his letter the half-brother of Jesus said that Christians are to be both **hearers and doers of the word** (**1:22 - But be doers of the Word and not hearers only -- deceiving yourselves**). The word "HEARERS" refers to those who accept God's Word for what it is ... truth. They have the right doctrine. The word "**DOERS**" refers to those who have the right behaviors. What follows in the next four chapters of James is an explanation of how this ought to play out in our lives and it includes things like ... **controlling the tongue** (**1:19-20; 3:5-6 -- How great a forest has been set ablaze by such a small fire – and the tongue is a fire; 4:11-12**), **caring for the poor** (**2:1, 15-16**) and **avoiding worldliness** (**1:27b; 4:5 -- Whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes**

himself an enemy of God). In the verses we're looking at this morning, James is addressing the second concern -- **caring for the poor**. Of course no one wants to argue that caring for the poor and needy is something we can ignore, especially after reading this passage and others like it. However, James' words in these four verses have been **controversial for centuries**, not because they focus on the poor and needy, but because they seem to imply that Christians are saved by our works (*which includes caring for the poor*) and not by faith alone. This is contrary to the cry of the reformation that brought about the whole Protestant movement ... **the just shall live by faith**! One of my good Catholic friends frequently quotes **James 2:24** to advocate that we're saved by works -- **You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone**. To which I usually respond with **Romans 3:28 -- We hold that one is justified by faith -- apart from works of the law**. TALK ABOUT SEEMING CONTRADICTIONS! Which one is it? **Are we declared to be righteous before God** (that's what it means to be justified) **through faith alone or is it through faith plus works**? And then there is a second question: **If it is by faith alone, then what is the relationship between faith and good works?** Another way of putting it is ... **Can a person believe the Bible and remain unaffected by it**? That's what we're going to look at in this message. Let's begin with the first part of **verse 14** and try to identify together the flow of what James is teaching. First, he talks about ...

Saying the right thing **(What good is it my brothers if someone SAYS he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? -- James 2:14a).** Remember, James was addressing believers who had made a clear profession of faith. These people were not undecided about the Lord. James calls them brothers because, in his mind, they were Christians. In the words of the Apostle Paul ... **they had already confessed with their mouths that Jesus is Lord and believed in their hearts that God raised Him from the dead. And anyone who does so, we're told in Romans 10:9 will be saved**. But James wanted his readers to know that MERE CONFESSION WITHOUT PERSONAL FAITH will not bring any person into a saving relationship with God. **BELIEF**, you see, **IS THE CRITICAL INNER RESPONSE OF A PERSON TO JESUS CHRIST THAT ALTERS HIS LIFE AND ETERNAL DESTINY.** Christians cling to Jesus as Lord of heaven and earth, our resurrected Savior, and the only hope for eternal life. **And that kind of faith in Him -- true saving faith -- is life-transforming**! It changes us. **We cannot remain the same people we once were when we truly come to believe in Jesus!** I think about a group of believers in **Buffalo, New York** that has found a unique way to bless their local community. They opened a **Subway** franchise **in** their church building. The reason? To provide employment and job training to the surrounding neighborhood. **Senior Pastor Darius Pridgen** explains the origins and aim of the idea: "**The reason we put it in the church was because there weren't a lot of (employment) opportunities in this neighborhood when I got here. We had a high murder rate and a lot of people not working. So, (when) people say, *'Just give people jobs*.' Well, (it turns out) that's not the key. (They need to be) trained. So**

we started receiving an offering. We called it a *franchise offering*. But we've got to do more than build a business. We've got to train people. We try to push people into the next level of life." **Don Fertman, Subway's Chief Development Officer**, recently waived the franchise fee for the church to open another similarly suited store in a nearby neighborhood. In addition, he encourages (other) Subway executives to consider it as a model for the future. These kinds of "***works***" should be commonplace for Christians because they're born out of a deep and abiding trust in the Lord and a desire to do His will.

The word for "***works***" in the *ESV* is translated as "***actions"*** in *Today's English Version*. **The idea is that Jesus gives HIs followers a new nature that earnestly desires to act as God acts**. We seek to abound in every good work (**2 Corinthians 9:8**) as a means to bring glory to God (**Matthew 5:16**). In the Gospels, the Lord uses the word "FRUIT" rather than "WORKS**"** but I'm convinced it pretty much means the same thing: **Matthew 7:16-18 -- By their fruit** (all one says and does -- D. A. Carson) **you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles** (answer: of course not)**? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit**). Whether we call them good works, actions or fruit -- they all point to the same thing ... **that one's confession is genuine because it is accompanied by saving faith**! **And true biblical faith is like throwing a pebble into a pond. Just as you can't throw one into the water without creating little ripples, so faith also has a ripple effect. It touches others through those who have been touched.**" But what about those people who profess faith in Christ, yet it has no direct bearing on their works, actions or fruit? ***This is what James addresses next. He acknowledges that some people*** **...**

SAY the right thing ... without DOING the right thing (If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? -- James 2:15-16). As an example of the kind of empty faith that fails to do the works of God, James imagines a confessing Christian who sees another brother or sister in Christ in need of food and adequate clothing, and instead of doing something about it, simply offers a blessing -- **Go in peace, be warmed and filled**. Not a bad blessing! ***The problem lies not with the words contained in it, but with the man who offers it***. He has no intention of doing anything to relieve the person's suffering, i.e. a good work. No, the only thing he offers is good wishes.

This calls to mind **the parable of the Good Samaritan** in **Luke 10**. A man is beaten, robbed and left for dead on the road leading from Jerusalem down to Jericho. A priest and Levite happen to come upon the unconscious man, but rather than offer help, they pass by not wanting to defile themselves. It would not be much of a reach to imagine

them praying a quick prayer as they did so (*just as I've done on occasion when I saw a person in need*). Then a Samaritan traveling on the road takes notice of the man, is moved with compassion, dresses his wounds, puts him on his own donkey, takes him to an inn where the injured man can recover, and pays for it out of his own pocket. Now let me ask you a question. If you were the person who was mugged and left for dead which would you value more **... *the Samaritan's good work or the priest and Levite's good wishes***? You get the point James is making! Saying the right thing without doing the right thing amounts to no blessing at all. It fails in the worst kind of way. **Talk, it turns out, is cheap when nothing else comes of it**.

There once was a five-year-old boy who was sitting on the front row of an auditorium watching a ventriloquist perform with his dummy on his lap. At one point in the show, the dummy began to carry on a conversation with the little boy. After the performance was over, the boy, thinking that he had found a new friend, approached the dummy to ask him to come over to his house and play. The ventriloquist, keeping up his act with the dummy, politely declined the boy's repeated requests until the little fellow became frustrated and said to the ventriloquist, "**He kind of reminds me of my Uncle Joe. Mom says he talks a lot, but he doesn't do much**." What a shame that some Christians are known for the same thing: talking a lot, but not doing very much. This brings us to a **third observation** from our text.

SAYING the right thing ... without DOING the right thing ... can only mean ONE thing (So also faith by itself if it does not have works is dead -- James 2:17). This is where I want to address the question, "Does the Bible teach that we are saved by faith alone in Christ alone or are we saved by faith and works?" Here's my answer: WE ARE SAVED BY FAITH ALONE THROUGH GRACE ALONE IN CHRIST ALONE! In this passage, **James is talking about defective faith that produces no works, and contrasting it with genuine faith that results in action**. And this is in keeping with what Paul wrote in **Ephesians 2:8-10 -- For by grace we have been saved through faith, and, not of ourselves, it is the gift of God. Not as a result of works that no one should boast. For we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works which He has prepared for us beforehand that we should walk in them**. Both Paul's point and James' is the same: **We are saved by faith in Christ, but faith that saves is faith that works**! The opposite is also true. Faith without works is dead!! It does not bring life to anyone.

So let's go over it again. **Saying the right thing** (that's our confession of faith) **without doing the right thing** (that's our demonstration of faith) **can only mean one thing** (we are not in Christ and our faith is dead). **As we conclude our series -- Affirming Our Faith Through the Apostle's Creed, it's always good to do a little self-assessment, especially**

in your spiritual life. May I challenge you this morning? Ask yourself these three questions and then honestly answer them.

- **What do I believe about Jesus?** If like many of us here this morning, you believe what the Bible says about Him and you have put your faith and trust in Jesus as your personal Savior and Lord, then you are born again.
- **Where's the evidence for my faith?** To truly believe in Jesus is to follow Him. It means that we walk in His steps and do the works that He did. In fact, Jesus promised that we would. **In John 14:12** He said, **"I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father"** (*in going to the Father Jesus would send the Holy Spirit who would provide the power to do the works of God*)**.** What kind of works did the Lord do? **He ministered to the poor, sick and infirmed; he delivered those in slavery to sin and the devil; he defended people who were unjustly accused; he brought many together while dividing others; he taught the Word of God with authority and clarity; he preached the gospel; he multiplied his faith into the lives of his disciples; and most importantly he laid down his life as a sacrifice for us**. **If you want to know with certainty that you're a Christian then ask if your fruit aligns with His.**
- **If there is no evidence, why do I think I have faith?** In the **parable of the Good Samaritan** that I mentioned earlier, the priest and Levite (both of whom knew the Scriptures well) passed by the man lying unconscious by the road. **Yet both of them would have argued to their dying breaths that they were men of God. Jesus, however, didn't see it that way.** So be aware ... If you (or I) turn a blind eye to others, if our faith does not produce the good works God has prepared for us, we may also discover that our faith is as dead as theirs.

Conclusion: Bill White from Paramount, California tells of an encounter that reminds him (and us) that ***real faith works***: Recently, while inching along in traffic, I saw two men in conversation on the sidewalk. One man was seated on a box at the end of the freeway off-ramp. **He was gray-haired and tired-looking, and he held a cardboard sign with a message written by an unsteady hand**: "***Please Help***." The other individual was **a Latino man**. They shared a brief exchange, and the Latino man walked away. As I slowly drove by the spot where the man in need sat on his box, I caught a glimpse of the younger Latino man walking down the street. I immediately recognized his gait—**it was Juan, an immigrant who attends the church where I pastor**. I pulled over, rolled down the window, and asked Juan if he needed a ride. "***No, my car is right there***," he said, as he pointed in its direction. Confused, I asked what he was doing walking down the street by the freeway. "***I just stopped to pray with that man and get him some food***," Juan said. "***Oh! Uh, wow***," I said. Then I drove off, moved by Juan's generosity. I found out

later that day that Juan had stopped before for the old man. A member of the church choir once witnessed Juan literally take the shirt off his back—a shirt his wife had just given him for Christmas—and give it to the man. Needless to say, it didn't take long to realize that Jesus was using Juan to show me what it looks like to be a good neighbor ... and I would add ... a Christian.

NOW LET'S WRAP UP OUR SERIES ON THE APOSTLES' CREED, BY RECITING IT TOGETHER ONE MORE TIME.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth: And in Jesus Christ His only Son, Our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into Hades; The third day He rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven and sits on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.