



Have you noticed that people can be confused about reality? Many kids think they're the fastest in school, yet one race will determine that there's only one. Many people think they are good drivers, yet driving around will reveal that just isn't true. Herman was out driving one day, minding his own business on the highway when his cell phone rang. His wife was on the phone, quite distressed. In near hysterics she said, "Herman, be careful! I just heard on the radio that there's a madman driving the wrong way on Route 280!"

Herman said, "I know. I see him. But there's not just one madman, everyone's driving the wrong way today."

We all know what it's like to live around people who are confused about reality. They believe something about themselves that just isn't true. But what if a person is deceived about their Christian faith? What if someone lived their whole life banking their eternity on beliefs that were misplaced? That would be the greatest tragedy of all. People should be able to know with certainty if their Christian faith is genuine or fake.

That's what our passage of scripture today is all about.

Faith = Compassionate Action

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save them?" (James 2:14).

The question asked here is, What good is the claim of Christian faith without Christ-like action? Notice the person described in this verse is claiming something; they are claiming that they have faith. They are saying, "I have faith in Jesus." It's important to understand, this person believes it's true of them.

And to both themselves and others, this faith can be challenging to see because faith is invisible. Have you ever thought about that? Hebrews 11 says that *"Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."*

So if we can't see faith, how is a person supposed to know if their faith is genuine or fake? This is the idea that's being set up in James 2:14. Since faith is invisible, there is one visible sign.

Action

In essence, James is saying. "If you truly have faith in Jesus, the actions of your life will show it." *The Message* says it this way: "Dear friends, do you think you'll get anywhere in this if you

learn all the right words but never do anything? Does merely talking about faith indicate that a person really has it?"

If a person claims to be a musician, wouldn't they prove it by playing an instrument? A person could carry a guitar with them. A person could listen to bands playing multiple nights a week. A person could talk about the key of C and 90 beats per minute. But it's not until you see them play that you'd know that person is a musician.

This is a very straightforward concept. I would bet that everyone in here accepts this. However, with Christian faith and action, sometimes we get a little squeamish about connecting the two. It's almost as if people get a bit offended by the notion of evaluating their Christian faith by their actions.

Let me give you the two reasons I've discovered for this squeamishness:

- » Human Nature. Good deeds outweigh the bad.
- » Catholicism. Certain actions secure salvation and other actions, mortal sins, take it away.

Faith + Action = Salvation

Faith = Salvation + Action

As a result, sometimes people get uncomfortable with the concept of actions being involved in legitimizing their Christian faith. God knows that. So he inspired James to address these concerns with an example. Let's make faith and action really practical.

"Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 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? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" (verses 15-17).

The same question was asked in verse 14, What good is it? What good is your claim to have faith? If there are no actions, there is no faith. These are strong words, intended to get the attention of the person who says, "I have faith in Jesus," yet they have no actions to show it.

God is saying, "It is so important to me that no one is confused or deceived that I will boldly confront you in order to get your attention." God doesn't want anyone to be confused on this issue. Sometimes people are driving down the highway the wrong direction and God wants to get their attention because God wants people to fully experience the grace and love he offers. He wants

people to experience salvation. He's offered the greatest gift to humanity in Jesus Christ. And he will not be satisfied with people having a partial experience. He wants his children to fully experience faith and walking in the Spirit and acting like Jesus.

Knowing that there will be some objections and confusion about this, the scriptures go on.

"But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder" (verses 18-19).

It's a set-up in verse 19 when he says *"show me your faith without deeds"* because faith is invisible. It's a matter of the heart. Based upon everything I've been saying, the only way you see faith is through the deeds. Faith and action are like a hand in a glove.

Isn't the connection to demons interesting and disturbing? A person who says, "I only have faith but I don't have any action" is just like a demon who believes in God. The demons believe in God. The demons have seen his glory. The demons have clearly seen his power. That's why they shudder! It's very clear to them. Yet they refuse to submit their will to God. They refuse to say, "Jesus is their Lord." As a result, they give intellectual agreement to the reality of God, but they have no saving faith in him.

These are sobering words in James, that a person could actually claim to have faith in Jesus, yet there are no Christ-like actions. They are in the same camp as these demons. As it said back in verse 17, *"faith by itself is dead."*

Some of you might be feeling guilt and condemnation. That's not the Spirit of God. Some of you might be feeling a bit proud of yourself. That's not the Spirit of God. Some of you quit listening to me 5 minutes ago and started daydreaming of your Memorial Day plans!

Let me see if I can get all of us on the same page. The idea in these verses from James is that invisible matters of the heart reveal themselves through visible actions.

As an example, take my love for my wife. That's an invisible matter of my heart. I told Cassie "I love you" for the first time 15 ½ years ago. I've told her thousands of times since then that I love her. I am claiming to have a love for this wonderful woman. Now, there are certain actions that would naturally accompany my love—dinner, talking, being together, bowling, walking kids to school. There are unpleasant actions too—taking the compost trash from the kitchen to the bin outside, cleaning up dog vomit, tallying our receipts to the household budget.

But I do these actions because I love my wife and it's a normal part of being in a relationship. If I never went to dinner with her, never talked to her, never did anything with her—fun stuff or the unpleasant chores—you would be justified to say to me,

"Shawn, your claim to love Cassie is a joke. You're fooling yourself." That's what God is saying to us in James 2.

To summarize up to this point—genuine Christian faith must show itself through Christ-like action.

Since today is Compassion Sunday, we are focusing on just one Christ-like action: Compassion. We could look at love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control. Evangelism, prayer, Bible study, meditating on scripture, studying theology, living Spirit led, how you spend your money, how you use your time. But we're just looking at compassion today. As a follower of Jesus, acts of compassion should be a natural part of our life.

What do the scriptures say about compassion? In the Bible, God is described as being like a compassionate father to those who revere him. *"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him"* (Psalm 103:13).

One of the Hebrew words translated "compassion" is derived from a root word meaning "womb," thus comparing God's love with maternal love. God's compassion, however, went beyond simply feeling the emotion; it was always demonstrated by specific acts that testified to his covenant with his people.

Jesus exemplified God's compassion in his preaching and healing. *"Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd"* (Matthew 9:35-36).

Compassion was one of the motives that drove Jesus' preaching and Jesus' healings.

He didn't do it because he was on "work hours."

He didn't do it because he was checking off his "To Do" list.

He didn't do it because the disciples organized a healing tour of the land.

He did it because he was literally "moved in his bowels." That's what compassion means in Greek.

Compassion points to the very core of a person's inner feelings, much as the term "heart" does today.

Imagine Jesus walking through Israel. It's dusty and hot. He's surrounded with a pressing crowd everywhere he goes. He's pouring out his heart as he preaches. He's engaging people individually as he hears of their physical ailments. And his heart is broken for them because they are like unprotected and neglected sheep. And his broken heart drives his preaching and healing. Jesus showed God's compassion for the lostness of humanity. *"As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it"* (Luke 19:41).

Jesus was looking down over Jerusalem, like we'd look over the Peninsula from the hills or Skyline. The mass of humanity is before him and he's overwhelmed by the spiritual darkness they live in. So he weeps.

When I was teaching a recent training on evangelism, this attitude permeated our discussions. Every week, we'd pour our hearts out to God in prayer and we'd share stories of talking with people about our faith. And our motive was this kind of broken-heartedness of people being spiritually lost.

As the church was getting established, compassion was to be an integral part of the Christian community. The apostle Paul listed a number of qualities that the Colossian church "as God's chosen ones" was to incorporate; the first was compassion. *"Therefore, as God's chose people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion ... kindness, humility, gentleness and patience"* (Colossians 3:12).

One Bible Encyclopedia said it this way: "One's intense inner feelings should always lead to outward compassionate acts of mercy and kindness."

It was with a heart of compassion that our Edge and Middle School group decided to sponsor Kedir, a 6-year old from Ethiopia. His father passed away and his mother makes as much money as she can selling bread. Unless Compassion International stepped in, Kedir wouldn't receive an education or proper nutrition. But because of the money our Edge and Middle School students give every month, Kedir gets all of this.

It was with a heart of compassion that one of our church members got involved in Project Read, an agency in Redwood City that teaches adults how to read. This agency was started because all of the city leaders—the police, the mayor, the fire department, the city council—identified illiteracy as the greatest threat to

Redwood City. Illiteracy is a trigger for cycles of poverty, unemployment and crime. So every Wednesday morning you can find this wonderful woman from CPC South at the Redwood City Library teaching her pupil how to read.

This past week someone in our church learned that her mother received a serious cancer diagnosis. Heartbreaking for anyone. More so because she'd been praying for 30 years that her mother would become a Christian, yet her mother was uninterested. It was with a heart of compassion that she told her Mom about Jesus' love for her this past week. And her mom accepted Jesus.

I am so proud of our church. You are Compassionate Hearts in Action.

Today I am asking you: Is God satisfied with the alignment of your faith and your compassionate actions? We have three specific ways our church will be responding today.

» Compassion International Sponsorship

» Bags of Love

» LoveWorks 365

Here's a few ways to increase your Compassionate Action:

» Memorize verses about God's compassion.

» Listen to songs that have a compassion theme, like Hosanna.

» Pray this simple prayer: God, give me a heart of compassion like yours.

Develop your compassion muscle by challenging yourself. You can grow. Sometimes we have to act first and let our emotions catch up.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

© 2015 Central Peninsula Church South, Redwood City, CA
Catalog No. 1412S

This message from Scripture was preached on Sunday, May 24, 2015 at Central Peninsula Church South
1005 Shell Blvd. | Foster City, CA 94404 | 650 349.1132 | www.cpcweb.org. Additional copies available on request.