



### **TEST NO.5: THE ACTION TEST**

If I were to ask you to describe true faith, I wonder what you'd say?

It's a challenge I've set many a youth group, over the years. And the demonstration I often use is this: I ask a volunteer to come forward. I blindfold them, stand behind them, and on the count of 3, ask them to fall backwards, into my arms. I then do the same again, only this time I'm standing in front of them (the look on the volunteer's face is usually a thing to behold!). Of course, what they don't know is that I've asked another volunteer to take my place behind them, to catch them should they have enough faith to actually do this thing.

And that – the action test – is the fifth test of faith that James gives us in his letter.

Let's take a look:

#### **James 2:14-26.**

You remember me saying that James isn't necessarily everyone's favourite NT book? One of the most famous people to take a dislike to it was Martin Luther, the guy who spearheaded the Reformation. Luther called it a 'Letter of Straw' and even suggested it shouldn't be in the NT. And it was this particular bit that really did it for him, because Luther's ethos statement, based on Ephesians 2, was 'justification by faith alone', and he decided that James was saying the opposite – that it's by faith, *and* works.

Now I want to make it clear – that is *not* what James is saying here. Because James isn't talking about what justifies us to God (only faith can do that), he's talking about the proof of it to others. Put another way, he's talking fruits, not roots.

And according to James, there are 2 kinds of faith:

**1) Dead Faith.** James here describes a faith that can talk the talk, but doesn't walk it; that makes no difference to us. And he gives us 2 examples of what it looks like:

- **Natural** (vs14-17). According to James, a dead faith will show itself in mere words, or empty platitudes. It's like offering a "God bless you" when what a person really needs is something to eat, or clean drinking-water, or a roof over their heads. And the comparison itself is actually an example of a faith that's not what it should be. Now this doesn't mean we shouldn't pray for a person – and sometimes, when we're talking about situations outside of our control, that's all we can do. But if our prayers are an excuse for selfishness, or a smokescreen for our indifference, well, as James says here, it's dead. It's lifeless.
- **Supernatural** (vs18-19). James' next example is a supernatural one, and it goes like this: "You believe God is one? Good for you! The demons believe it, too!" In fact, demons are pretty orthodox when it comes to their theology – they have no choice! So, what does that mean for us? Simply this: if you had a theological check-list, you could tick all the right boxes and still not be saved. You could claim to believe in God's existence; that Jesus is God incarnate; in the Trinity; in the virgin birth; in miracles; that Jesus was crucified; and in Jesus' resurrection, and still not be saved. Because you can wear a badge, but not own it.

Dead faith, then, is a faith that's all talk and no action. In fact, you could sum it up with a certain Elvis Presley song: "A little less conversation, a little more action, please!"

**2) Living Faith.** What does James mean by a 'living faith'? Well, again, he gives us 2 examples, in the form of 2 quite famous OT characters. Beginning with:

- **A patriarch** (vs20-24). James' first example is Abraham, the father of the Jewish people. Now the Bible calls Abraham a righteous man. But do you know why? Because he trusted or 'amened' God, and God accepted it as righteousness, which He then transferred into Abraham's spiritual bank-account (Genesis 15). But even so, in order for it to make a difference, Abraham had to be willing to obey God: to leave his homeland; circumcise himself (at 99 years of age! Imagine that conversation!); and – biggest of all – to sacrifice the son that God had promised. As a result, God blessed Abraham, and us through him.
- **A prostitute** (vs25-26). James' second example is Rahab. And I'm sure you know the story: when Israel was about to enter Canaan, Joshua sent 2 spies to check out the first city on the list: Jericho (Joshua 2). When

the king found out, Rahab hid them on the roof of her house, lied to the king's soldiers (don't ask), and helped the spies to escape. Why? Because she put her faith in the God of Israel and was willing to risk everything, for Him. As a result, the Israelites knew that her faith was genuine; she and her family were spared; and she became a part of God's people and an ancestor of a certain carpenter from Nazareth!

I.e. a true, living faith is a faith of active surrender. And speaking of Jesus, He proved it Himself by setting aside His majesty, taking on humanity ... and dying for us.

### **Your Score?**

So how would you describe your faith today? Is it alive and well? Or are things looking a bit ... iffy?

In case you're still not sure, here's a little story to wrap things up. Anyone heard of Charles Blondin? He was a 19<sup>th</sup> century French trapeze artist who made a reputation for himself as a tightrope-walker. And the most amazing stunt he ever pulled was crossing Niagara Falls, in full view of thousands of people. First time, he just walked across – took him less than an hour. The second time he took a table and chair and stopped part way for lunch. Then he did it blindfolded, then on stilts. Finally, he addressed the crowds and said, "My friends, I am going to cross the falls one last time." And the crowds cheered. Then he said, "Only this time, I am not going alone – I am going to take someone with me!" The crowds started to shout, "Blondin, Blondin, Blondin!" He asked them, "Do you believe I can do this?" And they shouted, "We believe! We believe! We believe!" Then he said, "Which of you will it be?" And they all went quiet. And out of that crowd, one man (his manager) stepped forward, clambered onto Blondin's back, and for the next hour or so was carried across Niagara Falls.

The point is obvious, isn't it? They all claimed to believe, but at the end of the day only one of them believed enough to act on it. Which brings us to the following questions:

- How is 'active faith' different to 'salvation by works'?
- What might hinder a person from acting on their faith?
- How does your faith show itself in day-to-day life?