

January 6, 2019

KIBC Sunday Worship Service (the New Year Worship)

Message by Pastor Teiichiro Kuroda

Title of the Message: "What is the True Faith?"

— Keeping a Balance —

Text: James 2:14

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

Introduction

Happy New Year! Its 2019! I give thanks to the Lord that we have the New Year Worship Service with my dear brothers and sisters today.

We are given the Word from James 2:14 today.

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

1. The Scripture above penetrated my heart.

How about you? Do you think that your **faith** has **deeds**? As for me, I can frankly say, "No". I had pain and was troubled whether I, who had faith without deeds, was qualified to be a pastor and preach God's Word of the Bible.

However, when I carefully read the Scripture, I was taught that James didn't mean literally (qualified or not). **It is a rhetorical question. It is a question that expected an answer "No."** No one can answer "Yes", even though he may be a pastor. No one is completely qualified.

A human being sees well other people. However, it is difficult to see themselves. Therefore, we carelessly point out those who lose balance between **faith** and **deeds**. It causes us to break a good relationship. Why did James record the rhetorical question where the answer was "No". It was my first question.

2. I had another question from the Scripture.

It is true that Paul insists that **a man is saved through faith by God's grace**. A man can not be saved by the law no matter how much he try to follow it. (In fact, it is impossible to follow it.) We also believe that salvation is by grace, not by deeds.

However, James records, "What good is it, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?" (The German Bible records it is death.)

My friends, don't you think that Paul's insistence is in apparent conflict with James' one?

What do you think about these two teachings? We, who easily give up faith, need to listen to today's Scripture with respectful attention.

Let's consider today's Scripture according the following two points.

Main Points

1. The Principle of Faith

1a. What Is Faith?

James records as below—

1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves.

He continues,

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

A certain pastor said that faith is mainly divided into two contents.

① To believe

It is to believe that the true God is only one, to believe the presence of God, God is love and God is the Almighty One. Believing these things is done by faith. They are very important things.

② To trust

It is not only to believe the presence of God but also entrust my being, my life to God. It is quite different than children believe, "He/she is my parent" and he trusts on him/her.

Faith is *pisteue* in Greek and it means to trust in someone. It means that he has a personal relationship. When we understand faith like this, the Word of Jesus is realized.

15:5 "I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. John

Jesus taught through the parable of the relationship between a vine and its branches and there was life and the branches bore fruit. Paul also said as below—

Colossians 2:7 "Rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness."

The faith is to believe in a personal relationship and trust in.

1b. What is the True Faith?

Then what is **the true faith** like?

James records as below—

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

On the other hand, Paul records as below—

Romans 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing

the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

3:28 For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.

Do you feel something strange between these two teachings?

We need to understand there were Jewish Christians behind Paul's teaching at that time. They insisted that they must have follow a most important law that was **circumcision**.

In those days, circumcision was a crucial matter of life. Circumcision was the unconditional command that God had given to Abraham who was father of the Israelites. He who had no circumcision was dissociated from the Jewish society.

Therefore Jewish people could not stop having circumcision even after they became Christians. Christian society in those days was divided into two by the issue of circumcision. They were

1. Jewish Christians who insisted on having circumcision, and
2. People who insisted that they had no problem whether they had circumcision or not.

The issue of circumcision gradually escalated into a big problem. Then, a very important council was held that was called **the Council of Jerusalem** (the church council). The Council gave a definition what the faith was. It was held in A.D.49 and it is recorded in Acts, Chapter 15. Please read the chapter. The Council concluded that the condition of salvation did not depend on whether a man had circumcision or not. It is the message that the New Testament teaches us.

Galatians records as below —

5:6 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value.

Like this, Paul taught that salvation was given through faith in those days of many Jewish Christians. However, some of the saints who were saved by grace through faith became inappropriate as believers. So, James taught that the faith without deeds was fatal.

1c. Difference between Paul's Situation and James One

Now, let's consider what I mentioned up until now. That is that Paul discussed **how to be saved** and James discussed over **the evidence of being saved**. Paul had fought against Jewish Christians and James had fought against antinomians.

Therefore, their teachings were not mutually exclusive. In fact, they complemented each other. We are saved through faith by God's grace and at the same time the true faith follows **deeds** of love. This is also true.

Jesus taught importance of faith and also deeds in faith by the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:21~27)

James calls, **"My brothers and sisters."** His teaching is full of love for family members. He really wanted those who were in Christ should have live like this. James didn't compel them to his teaching.

Therefore, both teachings were right. Now the big issue is a balance between faith and deeds

that James teaches.

2. The Balance between Deeds and Faith

2a. Christian Life

Jewish people and Gentiles were saved only by God's grace, not by the law. However, some of them thought that they could get a ticket for heaven and felt relieved too much and finally they became careless about their Christian lives. (Growing too much accustomed to God's grace)

The same thing can be said in our days. We often hear, "Is he a Christian? I can't believe it! If he is a Christian, I wouldn't become a Christian." It is very regrettable, but we can't deny it. The problem is that their Christian lives lose the balance between faith and deeds.

On the other hand, a certain man says like, "I want to be a Christian because I was impressed by your behavior." It is a great testimony. I pay my respects to those who live a well-balanced Christian life. However it is very difficult problem for me.

How about you? What kind of Christian life do you live?

2b. Practicing Christian Life

The problem is how we can strike a balance between **deeds** and **faith**. We understand that both are very important. The point is it is difficult to keep a balance.

Faith and deeds are like two wheels of a car. It is impossible to live a Christian life by a unicycle. It means how to balance between two wheels and it also means that we contains two contrastive things in us.

When we contain only one of two things, it is said to be biased. However, it doesn't mean to take a middle course. It is halfway measures. Keeping a balance means that at first sight, the contrastive things exist together in someone so faith and deeds are very important for our lives.

I looked my life from the viewpoint of **faith** and **deeds**.

I believed in God when I was 14 years-old. I remember that I clearly understood my sin in me, I repented and prayed with tear.

My Christian life began at that time (with faith, not deeds). It was God's grace. However, if I am asked to show my deeds in faith, I have to accept my insufficiency. I feel I am immature.

Then, I prayed and asked God how I keep a balance between faith and deeds.

God taught me as below—

3. To Understand the Christian Life that the Bible Teaches

The problem is that we can't see ourselves. That is the problem.

The only way to see ourselves is to stand before a mirror. Martin Luther, a German Protestant reformer, said, "The Bible is the perfect mirror of our hearts." We need to stand before the mirror that reflects our whole body. The problem is not to stand before the mirror

and to look at other people. This is my problem.

Like this, when I opened the Bible and read the Word of God, I gradually saw my attitudes and behaviors. The Word showed my real self and taught how insufficient I am. However, God saved me through faith by grace. The more I clearly understood my insufficiency and God's grace, I was filled with thanks to God.

Then I began to seek a Christian life that God pleases. One of God's natures is justice. He denied injustice and is pleased with truth.

I was taught that I should live honestly before God not as a man of a double personality. Strangely enough, I felt relief at that very moment. Yes, that's right! I was taught not to work hard but to live frankly (honestly). I really gave thanks to God.

I kept on reading the Bible and learned the lives of our forerunners of faith. I understood that we can study the well-balanced life through them.

{Illustration}

I have read a book entitled *President Abraham Lincoln Who Changed the White House into the Prayer House*. I was really encouraged. I learned a lots from President Lincoln who feared God and lived faithfully before God. It is said that President Abraham Lincoln was respected most among the successive presidents of the United States.

It is the Bible that President Lincoln was greatly affected by. He said, "I like a friend best who gives me books."

I was really encouraged that President Lincoln learned the secret of the balance of faith and deeds from the Bible. The reason I was inspired was that I have the Bible like him and study how to live a Christian life like him.

I believe in the same God that President Lincoln believed in.

I reconfirmed that **the Bible is the perfect mirror of our hearts.**

4. Another Advocate

People judge other people with different measure. When God, who is justice, intervenes in our lives we are greatly influenced. God who is the Spirit approaches us as the Holy Spirit.

Jesus said as below—

John 14:16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—

When the Spirit of God (the Holy Spirit) stepped into my life to lead my journey of life my life is changed. My imperfect life becomes better and the balance of faith and deeds gradually comes to make up. It is really a blessed Christian life. This is what I want.

Therefore, we don't need to keep a balance between faith and deeds by our own selves. It is impossible for us to fulfill our lives with our own power. We should walk with help of **another advocate** (the Holy Spirit). I have hope in this point because I know best that it is impossible for me to keep a balance between **faith** and **deeds** on my own.

My friends, how about you? Let's pray and ask God for help in keeping a balance between faith and deeds of our Christian lives in 2019.

Conclusion

Title of the Message: "What Is the True Faith?"

— Keeping a Balance —

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

We studied very important thing in our Christian lives. It is to keep a balance between **faith** and **deeds**. What Paul and James taught each stressed points and they complement each other's teaching.

I was taught to keep a balance as a Christian as below—

1. To understand the **Word of God**
2. To walk with **another advocate (The Holy Spirit)**

* God bless you!